

Makai Senki Disgaea: Returned

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Translation Notes

Another big thanks to the creators of Jim Breen's WWWJDIC and 漢字そのまま DS 索引辞典. With more practice, I am relying a bit less on dictionaries, but these have still been a tremendous help.

Many of the notes regarding the previous volume still hold, particularly in regards to the characters' speech patterns, so I won't repeat those here. I've still tried to remain fairly literal in my translation, but I think I've achieved a slightly more natural sound in this volume.

Romanizations

More new characters have been introduced in this volume, and for some of them I haven't seen a consensus on how their names should be romanized. I've decided on the following:

- **Telle** (テール *teeru*) - I've seen this both as Terl and Terre, but the first doesn't strike me as very angelic, and while I like the second I really wanted to maintain the rhyming between his and his wife's name, and Erre doesn't seem quite right.
- **Elle** (エール *eeru*) - Again, I've seen this as Erl, but I don't think that captures the same airy sound.
- **Vijan** (ヴィジャン *vijan*) - Originally I was going to translate this as "Vision" because I wasn't certain what they were in their first appearance. This is a valid way to write the English word "vision" in *romaji*, and it may be what the author was going for, but I decided to go with a straight transliteration. I think it has a more alien feel to it.

Dialogue

- **Kira**: Kira's manner of speech has changed completely since becoming a prinny. That being said, he doesn't speak 100% like the other prinnies. Though he typically does add the "dood" or つす *ssu* ending, his word choice otherwise can be slightly more aggressive and masculine.
- **Lamington**: Lamington refers to himself as the standard *watashi* and speaks to Laharl with polite *desu* forms. He uses casual, slightly masculine forms with his subordinates. He doesn't use contractions like *dewa* into *ja*.
- **Telle**: Telle uses polite forms with Laharl, but speaks casually with his family. He uses more masculine endings than you would expect, though I imagine his voice having a jovial quality to it.
- **Elle**: Elle speaks very similarly to Flonne, using polite standard Japanese with feminine endings. In fact, the two of them are difficult to distinguish when taking part in the same conversation. However she does tend to sound a little older.
- **Ozonne**: Ozonne refers to herself as *boku* and speaks using casual, masculine forms. The syntax is still far from macho and is similar to how Alphonse Elric speaks to his brother. Coming from a girl, though, it presents a very tomboy attitude.
- **Celestian Prinnies**: Their manner of speech is slightly different from the Netherworld prinnies. It is slightly more polite and feminine (they actually do say です *desu* sometimes instead of the abbreviated つす *ssu*), and they refer to themselves as the

standard *watashi*. They usually end their sentences with *ねえ* *nee*, or otherwise extend the last syllable a beat, giving their speech a somewhat lazy quality.

- **Carter:** He refers to himself as *watashi* and uses casual, masculine forms. He tends a bit towards more formal and literary turns of phrase, and can be brusque. He repeatedly refers to Laharl and the others as *kisama(ra)*, one of the more derogatory forms of "you."
- **Genesis:** I don't actually recognize the way he speaks, but some of the phrases I had to look up were marked as "obsolete" in my dictionary.
- **Vijan:** The Vijan talk to each other using casual, slightly masculine forms, but use standard polite forms with others and refer to themselves as *ware*. With their Creator, they use *keigo*, honorific language.
- **Vyers:** Vyers refers to himself using *watakushi*, which is probably the most formal version of "I" and I associate it with nobility. (Laharl actually uses it in the game when writing his letter of challenge.) In general he has a very flowery way of speaking and does borrow several words from French. "Moi," however, was the way *watakushi* was rendered in the game translation, and he doesn't actually use it.

Characters



Prologue

It is said that it lies in a place deeper than any ocean, and blacker than any darkness.

A world of dark, where sinister beings enthralled by darkness gather...

Where is this land?

The answer is uncertain.

But, deep within everyone's heart, he believes in its existence, and fears it.

That, is the Netherworld—

A world of wicked darkness which together with Celestia, and the human world, comprises the three worlds.

In the depths of that Netherworld, a tiny presence raised a cry.

And again, in the remote darkness of space the same war cry arose.

The two cries that had risen at the same time held the same meaning.

It was known by the name: revenge.

1: The Angel's Homecoming

1

Patter patter patter, tromp tromp tromp!

"Prince! Are you awake!?"

Noisy footsteps and a voice burst into the silence of the room's interior.

Shoved open with a bang, the door grimaced and complained.

"Huh? He's awake."

The girl who had come running took in the state of the room, and her voice revealed her disappointment.

Her red hair was gathered to either side in a hairstyle that gave the appearance of explosions. She dressed in black leather that exposed her navel, and on her back were black wings. Her long tail waved back and forth in disappointment.

"You know, Etna, I can't be asleep every time you come to wake me. It'd be dangerous."

In a bed which itself was a granite coffin, rather than having the shape of a coffin, sat the owner of the room, who glared at the girl.

It was a boy.

He was younger than the girl called Etna, maybe 13 or 14 years old. His dark blue hair stretched back from the front like two antennae. In shorts and a red scarf, there was no one in the Netherworld who did not know him: Overlord Laharl. His age, from a human perspective, was in actuality a hundred times that.

"Oh, no, Prince. I wouldn't do anything to you, now would I?" Etna laughed while non-chalantly moving her hand behind her.

"What are you holding behind you?"

"Eh? Oh, Prince, come on now." Etna's smile was drawn tight.

"You....." Laharl muttered, something in his temple twitching.

"What is it?"

"Stop it with the 'Prince' already!"

"What's the big deal? There's nothing to fret over."

"Yes, there is!" Laharl asserted bluntly.

"What's that?"

"My dignity!"

"But you haven't had anything like that from the start," Etna sighed, turning her face away.

"Did you say something?"

"Nope, not really," Etna said, playing dumb.

"Your Majesty, are you awake, dood?"

Just then, the door opened on its own, and a group of stuffed penguins came running in.

"Listen! Even the prinnies have learned to call me 'Your Majesty.' You should follow their example." Impassioned, Laharl clenched a fist.

Prinnies were the lowest-ranking servants in the Netherworld. The prinnies in the castle had originally been hired as mercenaries by Etna.

"That's just because you fitted them with something weird, Prince."

"It's not something weird. It's called a conscience circuit."

"A conscience— Prince, don't you get embarrassed saying that?"

"A- a little." Laharl groaned as he said it as though he felt ill.

"And anyway I don't think demons have a conscience or anything like that."

"It's enough that it's in regards to me!"

"He's saying self-centered stuff again," Etna grumbled under her breath, gripping the hidden dagger she intended for back-stabbing. It would be trouble if the prinnies found it, so she quickly hid it and instead took out the thing she had brought. Even without that, Laharl and Etna's bickering was known as comic dialogue not between a couple but between master and servant, and it was circulated in secret in the town's papers. It wouldn't be any fun to provide them with more material.

"Well, what is it? If you were about to interrupt me from a peaceful sleep, then that means there's an incident."

"That's some attitude for a brat who just happened to wake up earlier than usual," Etna muttered under her breath, and then she offered what was in her hand. "Well, um. A letter arrived."

"It's something that trivial!? Hand it over!!"

Laharl held out his hand. But, Etna hesitated to hand over the letter, and drew back her hand.

"Ah, I'm telling you, it's bad if you take it all at once."

"What the hell are you going on about!?"

Having snatched the letter from her, Laharl's expression twisted as though he had grabbed a cloth soaked in puke.

"Uhn..... What's this pure, refreshing feeling without one bit of filth?"

As quickly as he could, he stretched his hand far out and turned his face away.

"Where did this letter come from!?"

"From Celestia."

"Why didn't you say so first!?"

"You're the one who stole it before I could tell you."

For a moment Laharl faltered on what to do, but then he remembered the prinnies waiting behind Etna.

"Well, what do you lot want?" Laharl asked them.

"Flonne-san has come to see you, dood."

"Let her in already," he ordered thoughtlessly and ill-humoredly, and all at once the prinnies ran out. The one who entered in their stead was a blonde girl wearing an enormous red ribbon. Next to her airy white clothes, the black wings on her back looked incongruous.

"Laharl-san! I have something to talk—"

The girl opened her mouth, but Laharl thrust the letter at her. "Before that, read this for me, Flonne."

"Eh? A letter? Laharl-san, weren't you able to read the characters?"

"There's a limit to how much you can make fun of me! Just read it already!!"

Flonne took the letter that Laharl held out as though he were about to throw it, and she looked in surprise at the unmarked envelope.

"Ah! It's from Lamington-sama!!"

He was the Seraph, the highest ranking angel in Celestia.

"You can tell just by looking at it?" Etna said in surprise.

"Lamington-sama's aura is unique. And it's very strong."

"Hm..... This stench certainly isn't ordinary." Laharl grimaced.

"That's terrible! What stench!?" Flonne huffed as she broke open the letter, but suddenly she cocked her head and then shook it. "Huh?"

"What is it?" Laharl asked.

"I feel a little....." Flonne took her eyes from the letter and looked up at the ceiling.

"What's wrong?" asked Etna.

"My chest feels sort of....."

Seeing Flonne seizing at her small chest, Etna clapped her hands in understanding.

"Even if you used to be an angel, you're a fallen angel now, so you've gotten weak against Celestia's aura."

"You've finally been tainted by the Netherworld," Laharl said.

"Noo....."

Flonne took three deep breaths, and then she returned her gaze to the letter and nodded once.

"I'm all right. It's been a while since I've been affected by a pure essence, that's all."

"If you're at the stage where you can say you're 'affected' by it, isn't it already hopeless?" Etna said teasingly.

Flonne scowled at Etna, looking about to cry, and then she unfolded the letter. "I'll read it now."

She jumped into it with determination, but she stumbled over the first part. "How do you read this one?"

"Which one?" While keeping her distance, Etna peered at the letter. "It's 'Dear Sir.'"¹

"You gonna be all right?" Laharl interjected.

"It was just a little hard!" Flonne said. She sucked in a breath in order to read the next part, and three lines furrowed her brow. She stopped there.

"Umm, his writing is so refined, I can't read it."

"You don't have to read every character of every sentence, so just give a decent summary of the parts you do understand," Laharl ordered easily, waving a hand.

Flonne made a troubled face as she continued to read the letter, and after 30 minutes had passed she finally lifted her face.

"Umm, I have it. To put it simply, he wrote, 'I have some business with you, so come to Celestia,'" Flonne responded, full of confidence.

Everyone in the room awaited the next part in silence, but Flonne did not continue further.

"That's it?"

Laharl looked at the letter in Flonne's hands to confirm it. He took the opened letter from Flonne's hands to spread it at his feet, and kept it at a distance on the floor.

"Yes." Completely confident, Flonne nodded.

"It's laughable to think that he would write this with such audacity."

"Flonne-chan just turned it into that on her own."

"Even if it's wrong, she won't admit it, huh."

¹ Flonne is having trouble reading the *kanji* for the opening of a formal letter. Presumably 謹啓, since Etna provides the reading *kinkei*.

"Well, it seems like she's just going to stand there smiling anyway."

"Ehh, what's wrong with me smiling?" Flonne protested, puffing out her cheeks, and Laharl turned a dissatisfied glance on her.

"This's what you get from a follower....."

"Huh? Prince, are you jealous?"

"D-don't be ridiculous!" Laharl cleared his throat, and very stiffly avoided the question. "Anyway, so it's a written invitation."

"It could be a trap," Etna replied eagerly.

"What are you getting excited about?"

"Well, it'd be fun, wouldn't it?" she said, and out of nowhere she produced weapons and ammo as though to equip them right away. "The prinny squad will go anywhere you send them, you know."

"We're not invading."

"You say that, even though you really want to attack," Etna said, and elbowed Laharl in the side. "Doesn't it make your demon's blood boil?"

"Um—?" Flonne timidly broke into the dangerous conversation.

"What is it, Flonne?" Under Etna's offensive, Laharl seemed to be looking for an excuse to escape. "Right, you had some business. What is it?" he asked, looking relieved.

"Well, that is, actually I've also gotten approval to return home to Celestia for a while."

"Hmm, even though you've fallen from Celestia, you can return. That's pretty lenient," Etna said.

"Yes. It's Lamington-sama's kindness."

"In that case, we'll be going together?"

"That's right!"

"Oi, you two, don't get ahead of yourselves!"

"Huh? Aren't you going, Prince?"

"Who said I wasn't going!?"

"Then it's decided, isn't it?"

"I'm looking forward to it." Flonne smiled broadly, just like a child going on a picnic.

"Y-yeah."

As though overpowered by Flonne's smile, Laharl wound up nodding, too.

2

The following morning, Laharl called Etna and Flonne to the castle's hall. For the occasion, he had ordered Etna to bring along prinnies to carry their luggage.

"Flonne, you ready?" Laharl asked her.

"Yes. I've completed both my preparations for moving and the magic array."

A circle was drawn on the floor of the hall. From within, Flonne would use magic to take them to Celestia.

Just then, a cheerful voice rang out.

"I'm going, too!"

A small girl came running at top speed.

"Shas-chan, why have you come?"

Flonne's eyes widened. It was the case that this was Laharl's cousin, whom Flonne was taking care of at her own place.

"You're going out, aren't you? Take me with!"

Shas's eyes were bright with anticipation as she jumped up and down, but Laharl shook his head at her.

"Not this time. Behave and look after things in our absence."

"Eh~!? Laharl-chan, you're mean."

"I won't tolerate you setting traps in Celestia."

"I'm sorry. We'll take you along the next time we go somewhere," Flonne soothed her.

"Uu~" Shas glowered at Laharl with upturned eyes, and puffed out her cheeks.

"Once we get back, I'll play with you," Laharl said with difficulty.

"Really?"

"I'm the Overlord. An Overlord doesn't go back on his word."

"Got it." Seeming to understand, Shas ran out of the hall.

"Are you all right? Promising her that without thinking it through," Etna said as she watched Shas's back.

"What? If it gets to be a pain, I'll just make the prinnies play with her," Laharl said, and he shifted his gaze to the nine prinnies lined up in front of him.

"Ehh. Don't make us, dood."

"Not you. There must be another lot who's free."

Surveying the relieved prinnies in a glance, Laharl asked, "Oi, Etna. How were these guys chosen?"

"What do you mean, how?"

"The King of the Netherworld is going to pay a visit to Celestia. So as not to have anything happen to injure the dignity of the Overlord, my subordinates need to be of a standard to act accordingly."

"R-right. It's fine. I selected them appropriately," she said, but really she had just brought along arbitrarily some of the ones that had been playing in the courtyard.

Inwardly, Etna stuck out her tongue.

"But, these guys, there's no way to tell them apart by looking at them. If by chance one of them misbehaves and we don't know which, it'll be a problem."

Laharl folded his arms and thought, and then, he clapped his hands.

"There's no getting around it. For convenience, I'll number them and make it easy."

All together the prinnies raised their voices in protest.

"That's skimping, dood!"

"Don't call us by numbers, dood!"

"Shut up!" Laharl roared. "I'll number you myself right now!" he declared, and he began chanting a spell. It was Fire. He pointed his fingertip at the gathered prinnies.

"Don't move."

With broad grins hovering on their faces, the prinnies stood as rigid as statues. Because all that was inside of them in the first place were the souls of sinners, not moving was an easy thing.

A thin flame burst from Laharl's fingertip. The flames ran to the prinnies' foreheads, and numerals emerged on their burned stuffed bodies.

Patting out the fires on their foreheads, the prinnies compared each other's marks.

"What number am I, dood?"

"Number 2, dood."

"Yes, I'm number 4!"

"That's a good number, dood. I got 7. That's unlucky, dood."

"You, so you're number 9? That's awesome,² dood."

Seeing the prinnies, some delighted and some disappointed, Laharl ordered them,

"You lot, remember your numbers well. If you like, why don't I write them on your arms, too, so you don't forget?"

"That's okay, dood!"

All together the prinnies shook their heads back and forth.

"All right, now bring the luggage," Laharl said, and then his eyes stopped on an unusually large box that appeared to be Flonne's.

"What's that huge suitcase of yours?"

"This one? Some changes of clothing and my figures."

Laharl's brow furrowed. "You mean, you're going to spread your *otaku* hobbies in Celestia, too?"

"Yes. But, they aren't *otaku*. Love, it's love."

In order to teach love to demons, Flonne had decided first to teach them to have affection for objects, and taught the assembly of figures in her own house. As could be expected with Flonne, whose nature it was to love heroes, the children seemed to be turning out the same.

"Will you do something about your Love Freak ways already? Besides, aren't all Celestians Love Freaks without you going out of your way to teach them?"

"Y-yes, well, that may be true, but—"

Flonne stumbled over her words, and Etna interjected as though she guessed what she was trying to say.

"Prince, there are some who aren't like that, too. I mean, the one who set that human Carter to attacking us was the Archangel."

"Right, that guy, Valcan or Vulcan or something."

"Vulcanus," Etna said, and Flonne coughed to cover it up and looked everyone over.

"Well then, are we ready?" Flonne said, like a teacher taking kindergartners on a field trip, and she confirmed that everyone was inside the circle she had drawn.

"Here we go, everyone."

Flonne spread both hands and closed her eyes, and began chanting a spell.

Along the circle, a white light arose, and stretched on upwards. In one instant, it seemed to grow intense, but in the next it had vanished. It was as though nothing had happened, but the scene around them had changed entirely.

"So we've arrived," Laharl muttered, looking up at what lay before his eyes. "It's the same huge gate as before."

Towering above them was an enormous white gate as tall as a 50-story building. It stood in their way as the boundary separating the Netherworld and Celestia. Now it stood flung open, but before Laharl had become Overlord it had been shut tight, and neither side had been able to come or go.

² The lucky/unlucky numbers here are the reverse of the norm. In Japanese the numbers 4 and 9 are unlucky, as they sound like death (死 *shi*) and suffering (苦 *ku*), respectively.

"Now, let's go," Flonne said.

She walked out towards the gate. Laharl and Etna³ followed after her. Only the prinnies, for whom this was their first experience, stood still as though in fear.

"Oi. Are you going to let your master go ahead of you!?"

When Laharl shouted over his shoulder, the prinnies ran bustling on.

At the moment they thought themselves passing under the gate, a different scenery spread before their eyes.

Dazzling, white sunlight.

Pure, clear air.

A wind gently brushing their cheeks.

Ornamented white pillars stood to either side, and arches covered the road. The road was perfectly straight. Along the roadside were neatly-arranged flower beds, and they boasted blooming flowers of a variety of colors. A faint scent drifted from them.

"It hasn't changed much, huh," Laharl muttered disinterestedly.

"There are things the angels don't like to change," Flonne said.

"Hmm, a conservative lot," Laharl spat in disinterest.

Behind them, the prinnies talked disgustedly.

"I feel terrible, dood."

"The air is bad, dood."

"What's this smell, dood?"

Already there were prinnies who tottered on the verge of falling over.

"The clean air of Celestia might be a bit tough on the lowest ranking demons," Etna said.

"Somehow or other they'll just have to be up for it!" Laharl said unreasonably, and disregarding them he continued on rapidly. Etna, too, followed after him.

"Around here is where we fought the Celestial Host, isn't it?" Etna said.

"Once we climbed this part, we got to put a sock in Vulcanus's vulgar laugh."

"And then before that. In front of the gate, Mid-Boss was showing off."

At Etna's words, Laharl grimaced.

"That's enough about that guy."

A voiced called out to Etna and Laharl from behind as they reminisced.

"Laharl-san, please wait a moment."

"What is it, Flonne?"

"I'm going to heal the prinnies."

"Let them be. If they're dropping at this stage, then they haven't been training enough."

"But, when I was in pain, there was a prinny who helped me. I want to return that favor."

"Nn....." Laharl frowned as though he were in some kind of pain. His expression was the same as when the subject of Mid-Boss had come up.

"Do what you want," he answered curtly, and he turned to face the other way.

"Even the Prince can't turn down that request, huh."

He made no reply to Etna's muttering. In a short while, Flonne had finished casting the Heal spell on the prinnies.

"I think you'll do a little better now."

"Oh, maybe."

³ It actually says "Flonne" but I'm assuming this is a typo.

From looking as though they were about to die at any moment, the prinnies had recovered enough to look like they might live out another year. But then, prinnies could not die again. Their souls could only be cleansed or annihilated.

"Where are we going first?" Flonne asked Laharl.

"It's courtesy to visit the one who invited us."

"Eh? You're going to follow etiquette?" Etna was surprised.

"You idiot! If we don't do the basics, we can't do demonic things like outwitting him or backstabbing him later."

"I see. You're really thinking this through, Prince~"

"Of course," Laharl replied boastfully, and he walked on ahead.

"All right, we're going to Lamington's place."

With the impression that they were walking to another's house as if it were their own, they pushed on down the white road in a line.

Located on a broad hill at Celestia's highest point was Lamington's white-walled estate.

It did not give the impression of a castle or a palace. It was made of stone, but it was simply a large mansion. A pure white house in the center of an expansive garden with neither walls nor fences.

They entered from the front, and right away someone appeared to greet them.

"My, so you really came."

The one ushering them in with a smiling face was a tall young man clad in white robes. His long, silky hair stirred in the cool breeze.

Seraph Lamington—that was this person.

In the earlier turmoil which had involved the Netherworld and Celestia, as well as the Human World, he had understood the intention of the previous Overlord Krichevskoy, who had died suddenly, and carried out a reform of Celestia. As a result, Flonne had become a fallen angel and fallen to the Netherworld, while Laharl had formally become Overlord without any opposition thanks to his one-hit visit to the Seraph, though Laharl harbored dissatisfaction with that method. Flonne was strongly attached to Lamington, but he could not trust this angel when he could never be sure if that face was really smiling or not.

"It has been a while, hasn't it?"

Laharl looked up at Lamington with his hand outstretched, and replied with a sour look, "It has."

"How would you like some tea?"

"You couldn't have called me here to have a chat over tea. Despite appearances, I'm busy. Tell me your business."

"You are as short-tempered as ever."

"You have too long a fuse."

"You have me there." Lamington smiled slightly and indicated an interior room. "Well then, let us speak inside. As for your companions, please wait here in the sitting room. I will have tea poured for you."

"In that case I'm sitting down." Etna sat herself down with a plop on the sofa.

In contrast, Flonne looked at Laharl with a concerned face. "Laharl-san....."

Laharl smiled at her. "There's no need to worry. Just wait."

"Okay."

As though worried even then, Flonne stared at Laharl's retreating back as he went further inside.

"He said he'll be fine. Whatever happens, there's no way the Prince will lose."

Etna smiled, but Flonne still looked worried.

"Ah, I get it! You're thinking the Prince might slug him one again, aren't you?"

"I don't think he will. It's because I don't really know what Lamington-sama is thinking....."

"Huh? Don't you trust him?" Etna clearly hadn't expected this.

"I do, but....." Flonne's expression sank into unease.

Meanwhile, in Lamington's room, Laharl sank down onto the sofa. Seated on the adult-sized sofa, the diminutive Laharl looked as though he would be swallowed up.

"Well then, it is abrupt, but let us talk business."

Laharl waved a hand obligingly, prompting him to go on.

"I should have made this proposal the time that you beat me, but to my embarrassment, I had not completed preparations here. As for the Netherworld, it seems that they follow you completely."

"Beating the ruler of Celestia leant some weight."

"I am glad."

A slight smile on Lamington's face, he looked down at Laharl. Something cold shivered down Laharl's back.

No, there's no way that I would feel fear.

Laharl denied it, but he could not shake the feeling. Seemingly unaware, Lamington continued his speech.

"In Celestia there are still those who hold hostility towards the Netherworld. Only those who opposed it outright have disappeared."

"So, what do you want to do?" Still not seeing where the conversation was headed, Laharl prompted him to continue.

"I think we should make it so that there may be traffic between Celestia and the Netherworld."

"I don't like friendships," Laharl replied instantly, but Lamington retried his proposal as though he had expected this.

"Well then, to begin with, how about we exchange only the same number of authorized candidates? We might even call them exchange students."

Laharl's eyebrows raised at Lamington's suggestion. "Well, being able to observe each other's movements is a fair condition."

"Then?"

"Fine. I'll accept your terms. You should be grateful." Laharl grinned broadly.

"You are just the same as always, aren't you?" Lamington smiled wryly. "Shall we sign this agreement?"

"There's no need. It's been decided between myself, the ruler of the Netherworld, and the Seraph of Celestia. I won't allow anyone to oppose it."

"I understand. Well then." As he spoke, Lamington extended a hand.

"I thought I told you I don't make friends." Laharl clapped the proffered hand for only an instant and then got to his feet.

"We will exchange each other's students later."

"Understood," Laharl answered over his shoulder, and then he left the room

behind him.

"Have you finished?" Flonne left her seat before anyone else and came running up. "Was there any problem?"

"Huh? No, it was nothing serious."

"Prince, what are we going to do now?" Etna asked as she stretched atop the sofa.

"It's not a pleasant place, but we did come all the way here. Let's have a look around."

"All right, dood!"

All together the prinnies flung up their arms. Only one was in low spirits. Prinny Number 9.

"Your Majesty, you're generous, dood."

"I didn't say that you lot could have fun."

"Eh!?" the reproached prinnies chorused.

"Well then, why don't you come to my house?" Flonne said.

"Your house?"

"Yes. My parents said that they really wanted to see you."

At her innocent remark, silence fell.

"They want to see their daughter's partner, huh, dood."

One prinny's muttering broke the silence. The other prinnies hooted, raising their voices in an *ohhh*.

"Eh?"

"Wha?"

Flonne and Laharl spoke up, looked at each other's faces, and hurriedly averted their gazes. Etna glared hard at the prinny who had made the remark.

It was Number 9.

Etna made a check mark in her mind to pay special attention to that one.

Somehow it had been bothering her from earlier.

"A-anyway, since they've gone to the trouble of inviting me, I'll intrude on them.

All right?"

Laharl tried to hide his agitation, and he walked off following his declaration.

3

"This is my house."

Flonne had led them to a house located much lower than the hill where Lamington's mansion was.

The private homes in the area stood apart from each other, and from here only the roofs could be seen. All round was filled entirely with flowers.

"This place is remote, huh." Etna spoke up in admiration. "No matter what happens, I don't think anyone would know."

"Nothing is going to happen!" Flonne raised her voice at the maliciously-smiling Etna.

"So these are those flowers you like." Laharl looked over the flower garden.

"They're *yuie*⁴ flowers. I brought some to the Netherworld, but they turned out a little differently."

"A little?" Laharl murmured aloud without thinking. Around Flonne's house—the House of Love where she spread the teachings of love—he didn't think there was anything but carnivorous plants with fangs.

"When the environment changes, the plant changes. They're delicate, you know."

"I- I see."

But the word 'delicate' had entirely the wrong connotation.

He gulped down his usual response, but he couldn't grasp which words to say next.

"But, how do I put it..... This, your house, it's different from the others....."

"It is?" Flonne asked, looking puzzled.

Etna nodded. "Yep, it is, however you look at it."

Even though the other houses they had seen on their way here had been made of white stone, the house before their eyes was made from wood cut from somewhere and had the appearance of a log house. There was a deck around the outside, and it was decorated with pots overflowing with flowers.

"It's like a mountain cottage, dood. It kind of takes me back, dood." Prinny Number 3 spoke up in wonder. Perhaps in his previous life he had lived in the mountains.

"But, mountain cottages don't have *that*, do they?" Etna said.

"Ah, that's right, dood~"

Etna and the prinnies were staring at the sign plate in front of the entrance.

Telle and Elle's Den of Love

That was written on the sign plate in rounded letters. Even more, they were done with a brush, large, and red.

"I'm home."

The moment Flonne set foot in the entrance, two people came running out from inside.

"Ahh, welcome back, honey!"

"Welcome home, Flonne!"

The couple both had golden hair and wore white clothing. They may have worn green and pink shirts beneath, because a trace of color showed through the white.

They each took turns embracing Flonne.

"Thank goodness. You haven't changed," her mother said.

"Have you been influenced by the Netherworld?" her father asked.

"Oh, that couldn't be."

"But, Flonne is so easily influenced."

Flonne and the others cheerfully enjoyed their family conversation.

"They seem like a couple who dances in the kitchen while they cook together,"

Etna whispered in Laharl's ear.

"Yeah, they do."

"I guess there are marriages that have a different meaning from your uncle and his wife, huh?"

"Don't mention those two." At once Laharl grew cross.

Laharl's father's brother—his uncle Vesuvio and aunt Yasurl had used the twins

⁴ ユイエ - This isn't in any of my dictionaries, and Google brings up a lot of Disgaea-related results, so I don't think this is the name of an actual flower.

Shas and Kira to try to push Laharl from the throne; it was an incident still fresh in his memory. Naturally, just talking about Laharl's hated aunt and uncle made him fall into an ill humor.

As though finally noticing Laharl and the others lined up behind their daughter, Flonne's parents bowed deeply.

"I am Telle," her father said.

"I am Elle," her mother said.

"We are Flonne's parents," they said in unison and once again lowered their heads.

"Uhn..... you're lively," Laharl groaned.

The two of them still looked only in their 20s. But then, one could not rely at all on the age they appeared.

Elle stepped closer to Laharl, and a bright smile came to her face. She resembled Flonne, but her hair curled slightly to either side, elegantly.

"Are you Overlord Laharl-san?"

"Yes." Involuntarily, Laharl gave an obedient reply.

Somehow I just can't go against this type, Laharl cursed inwardly.

"Thank you for looking after Flonne all this time. After all, our daughter does all sorts of careless things, but please treat her kindly."

Elle bowed her head deeply. Drawn in by it, Laharl, too, wound up bowing.

"I- I should be saying, I'm obliged to her."

"Has she been of some help to you?"

"W-well, she's done a number of things for me."

"My, is that so? That's a relief. I was constantly worried that she would make some sort of blunder."

"Mom! What do you mean, blunder!?"

"Dear, you're a scatterbrain, so I was worried that you would mess up your spells, or jump to the wrong conclusions."

"Even yesterday, she was worrying, 'I wonder if she'll be able to make it to the gate to Celestia,'" Telle said, and Elle smiled as though she wished he hadn't.

"Jeez! I'm not a child, so I don't do those things!!" Flonne replied indignantly.

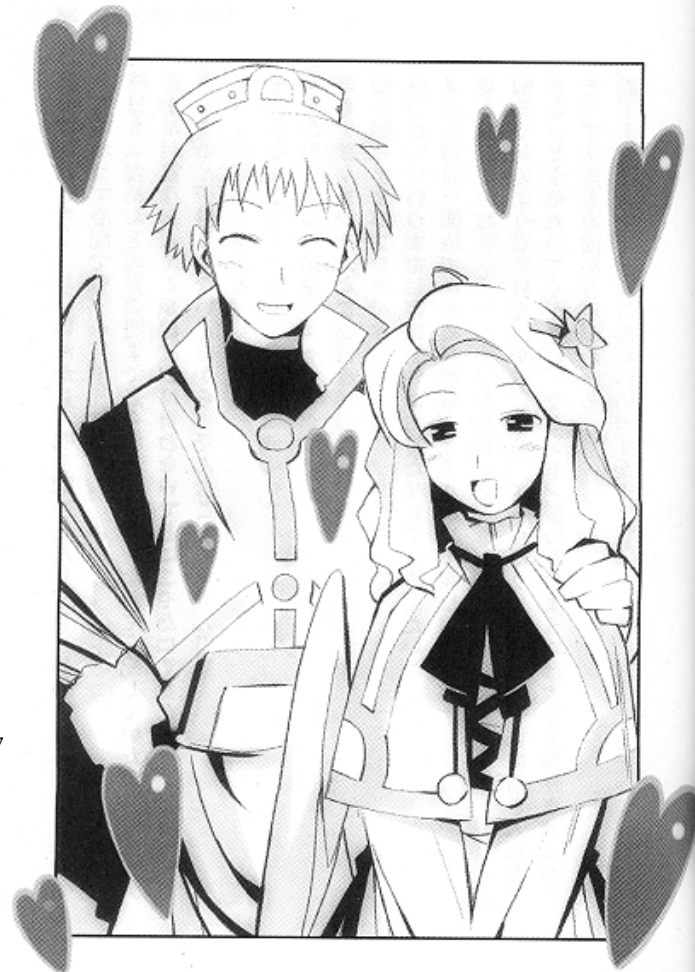
"I wonder?" Etna murmured teasingly.

"Not you, too, Etna-san." Flonne puffed out her cheeks.

"Oi, oi, how long are we going to keep our guests waiting outside?" Telle said to Elle while patting Flonne's shoulder soothingly.

"That's right, isn't it?" Smiling as brightly as a flower, Elle showed Laharl and the others into the house. "Now, please go inside. Although it isn't as large as Lamington-sama's house."

Then, a voice spoke up from the prinny troupe.



"Your Majesty, what should we do, dood?"

"You can hang around outside, I guess," Laharl said.

"I wonder if that's all right," Etna said worriedly.

"They're your subordinates, aren't they? Have a little faith."

"Eh? Prince, you've become an adult." Etna's eyes widened.

"That's what the conscience circuits are for."

"What are 'conscience circuits'?" At hearing the words for the first time, Flonne tilted her head.

"You didn't know? Wait a second," Laharl said, and beckoned to a prinny. "Oi, Number 7. Come here."

"What is it, dood?"

Not knowing what was going to happen to him, Prinny Number 7 came over innocently.

"I'm seizing your entire salary," Laharl told him cruelly.

"N-no, dood! Your Majesty's— Your Majesty's— Your— Your—"

Whatever he was trying to say, Prinny Number 7 could only open and close his beak, no sound coming out. In fact, his body began to convulse.

"That's what it is. They can't do anything like badmouth me, or get in my way or attack me."

"Like blowing the whistle, isn't it?" Flonne murmured as though something about it were very regrettable, and she turned reproachful eyes on Laharl. "But, isn't it awful?"

"Why?"

"To rob them of their freedom, I think it's terrible."

"You're really soft. To begin with, prinnies are made to work to atone for their sins. At their level, there is no freedom. Celestia's prinnies are made to serve in the same way, aren't they? There's not much difference."

"But, but—"

Flonne tried to say something, but she couldn't find the words. Meanwhile, Laharl spoke to Prinny Number 7 who was frothing at the mouth and rolling around.

"I was joking. You can go have fun around town. Look, here's a tip," he said, and cheers burst out as he tossed money at the prinny. The other prinnies ran off together with Number 7 who had received the money.

"Hmm, that's generous of you, Prince."

"If they disgrace me, then I'll just confiscate the fees they've received up until now."

"Wow~ Prince, you're such a demon."

"Heh, don't flatter me."

While brushing his bangs into place, Laharl stepped into the house.

The inside of the house was more expansive than the outside indicated.

From the entrance, the kitchen and dining room were on the right, on the left was a living room, and each of them was reasonably large. Moreover, there also seemed to be several guest rooms and bedrooms.

Elle led Laharl and Etna to one of the guest rooms.

"Will this be all right, Laharl-san? I'm afraid this is the best room in our house."

Laharl was about to look at the room when Flonne addressed her mother from behind him.

"Ozonne isn't here?"

"That girl, she's still out. She's such a troublesome girl, honestly."

"Who is Ozonne?" Laharl interjected without thinking.

"Um, she's my younger sister."

Laharl and Etna were stunned. Even though a considerable number of months and years had passed since they had met, this was the first they had heard of her.

"Wow, so you have a little sister, Flonne-chan."

"Actually, I haven't seen her in a long time myself."

"How long is a long time?"

"About 400 years....."

"That's pretty intense, huh. Did something happen?"

"I don't really know. One day, she just suddenly left word 'I'm going out,' and she left. If anything happened to her, we would feel something immediately, so I'm sure she's all right, but....."

Although it had to be a serious topic, Flonne's words were on the level of saying her sister had gone out to play and would be late coming home.

"So there's a lot going on in Celestia, too," Laharl said.

"Please don't worry about it. We'll go make you some tea."

Leaving them with that, Elle and Flonne disappeared into the kitchen.

Left behind, Laharl jumped up on the sofa, and tested how it felt sitting down.

"This isn't bad."

Patting the sofa and bouncing up and down, he looked just like a child.

Watching Laharl acting that way, Etna looked around the room. Suddenly her face split open into a grin of amusement.

"Hey, Prince?" Etna's smile was full of significance.

"What is it, Etna?"

"Are you going to be all right, being in here?"

"Why not?"

"Well, look."

On the wall Etna pointed to hung a scroll with painted characters.

Love will save the world.

"Oguah!?"

Laharl threw his head back.

On the ceiling was pasted a poster of the family.

Smiling brilliantly, all of them making the peace sign.

"Augh!"

Laharl somersaulted.

The window was a divinely glittering stained glass window.

A mother with an expression of pure love, and the figure of an infant held in her arms.

"Ugeh!"

Laharl was thrown flying.

"You're dying already, huh. Oh, and there's 'love' on the sofa, too."

On the sofa he had been sitting on moments ago, 'love' was written in huge letters.

On top of that, the rug was woven with 'dreams' and 'hope' and the like in bright letters making up the design.

"Ugah!"

Laharl leapt up so as not to touch them, but wherever he went there were nothing

but dangerous things.

"W-what is this place!?"

"What? It's Flonne-chan's house, isn't it?"

"I know that! I'm asking what the heck are these— these— these repulsive conditions!?"

"*Like I said*, it's Flonne-chan's house, so the answer should be obvious."

"Damn it. She is a Love Freak, isn't she....." he spat as he panted roughly. "But, this scene is even more....."

"If the kid is like that, it means the parents are, too, you know," Etna laughed.

"This isn't funny! Are you trying to kill me!?"

"Well, what are you going to do? Turn tail and run?"

With Etna cheerfully pressing him for an answer, Laharl swallowed down the words he desperately wanted to say.

"O-one who is Overlord can't desert under enemy fire! I'll accept this challenge!!" Laharl declared, clenching a trembling fist.

"Though I get the feeling I can see his defeat before the match even starts."

"Did you say something?"

"Nope, not a thing." Playing dumb, Etna looked off into nowhere.

Just then, Flonne came in.

"Laharl-san?"

"W-what?"

"Would you like to have your tea in here?"

"I'm coming. It'll be good to get out of here even for a little while."

His words already smacking of weakness, Laharl dashed from the room.

Cautiously, Laharl peered into the living room.

Hanging on the walls were pictures that were indeed joyful and positive, and the heart-shaped table looked dangerous, but level of positive happiness was lower than in the guest room.

"Please, have a seat."

In the midst of preparations, Elle gestured to the table. From the kitchen drifted the pleasant smell of tea.

Looking carefully at the chair, Laharl confirmed that there was nothing there, and sat.

"I hope you like it."

Elle lined up cups and bowls containing tea cakes in front of Laharl and Etna.

"This is pretty good. What do you call this tea?" Laharl asked after he had raised his cup and tasted a sip.

"It's a blend called 'Hope and Friendship,'" Elle answered, smiling brightly, and Laharl spat out the tea in his mouth.

"These cookies are—"

"Ah, they're fortune cookies. And they're good luck."

Etna broke open a cookie and pulled out the fortune.

"And these cups were produced from the most famous kiln in Celestia, 'Love and Fidelity,'" Telle explained, smiling, and Laharl jumped halfway to his feet. In all the numerous battles he had fought before now, he had never felt this panic.

"Are these guys trying to kill me with my allergies!?"

"It's unfortunate, Prince. If there were any busty women here, you'd be dying for

sure."

"That's not unfortunate at all!" Laharl glared at Etna.

"I'm sorry. Is it not to your taste?" Elle tilted her head, not really understanding.

"This is how we have fun in the Netherworld. Despite appearances, we're delighted," Etna replied. From her expression, she was having so much fun she could hardly stand it.

"I can't take it..... dood. Seriously, what a thoughtless lot..... dood," Prinny Number 9 spat, adding the prinnies' catchword like an afterthought.

He was alone. The other prinnies had gone rushing off in a group, and only Number 9 acted independently.

Prinnies were the temporary forms of the sinners' souls while they atoned and did their service in the Netherworld and Celestia. The period of atonement was proportionate to the weight of one's sins, and there were cases where that amounted to anywhere from 100 years to several thousand.

Among those prinnies, Number 9 was one who would have to spend quite a long time in service. His offense was the wounding and attempted assassination of the Overlord.

Before becoming a prinny, his name had been Kira.

He was Laharl's cousin.

Dead from the moment of his birth, Kira had become an evil spirit clinging to his twin sister Shas, but he had conspired with his father Vesuvio and mother Yasurl to take Laharl down, and he had attacked Laharl. However, because of Flonne he had been cleansed, and he had become a prinny.

"Hell, just the fact that an Overlord like that exists makes me feel si—"

Suddenly Prinny Number 9's body stiffened. The conscience circuit activated and sealed his mouth.

"This is annoying, dood."

Beyond having his freedom stolen, not being able to complain even a bit left him completely stressed.

"Yeah, I want to go somewhere, dood. One way or another I want to do something about Laharl, dood."

Just at that moment, a black shadow appeared on the field toward which he was headed.

No, rather than a shadow, the air became distorted and he could see through to the other side.

"A dimensional rift, dood?"

There were places in the Netherworld where it was easy to connect to another dimension. It seemed there were places like that in Celestia, too.

Prinny Number 9 cautiously went closer.

He didn't know what would appear from the other side. But, judging from the size of the distortion, he didn't think anything that big would come out.

What appeared was a tiny spaceship.

The hatch opened, and someone came out from within.

"Good. I've come out in Celestia as planned."

The one nodding to himself seemed to be human. His face could not be seen

behind his helmet, but from his build he was an adult man.

"I went through a lot of trouble to get here."

Then, the man in the spacesuit lowered his gaze, and met Kira's eyes.

"Hm? A prinny," the man muttered. "So they're in this place, too."

His voice was thick with hatred.

Next Time's Preview



2: A Steady Plot

1

"Good morning. Did you sleep well?"

The following morning, Elle knocked at the guest room, and Etna poked her head out.

"*Well...*" Etna replied, grinning.

"Uhn....." Having risen from the bed inside, Laharl's eyes were rimmed with shadows. "Even just sleeping, I kept taking damage....."

"Are you all right, Laharl-san? Did something happen?" Elle asked in concern, having peered into the room.

"N-no, I just slept awkwardly. Don't worry about it," Laharl said, but even so he escaped from the room. There, he let out a long breath, inhaled, and muttered in a small voice, "I'm alive again....."

Unperturbed by Laharl's deep breathing, Elle addressed him as though nothing was the matter.

"If you'd like, I've prepared breakfast, so please help yourself."

"I see, thanks."

When Laharl and Etna entered the living room together, Flonne looked at the two of them in surprise. Then she raised her voice in objection to Elle who entered behind them.

"Eh.....? Mom, did you put Laharl-san and Etna-san in the same room?"

"That's right."

"Why?"

"Was there some problem with that?"

"A problem..... Ohh..." Flonne gave a little moan and fell silent.

"Flonne-chan, what's wrong?"

"It's nothing!" Flonne replied to Etna's question in an unusually sharp voice, and turning her back she walked off into the kitchen.

"Hehe~" Etna laughed triumphantly.

"What are you so happy about?" Laharl asked.

"It's nothing~"

"What's with these two?" Observing Etna and Flonne's strange behavior, Laharl tilted his head.

From that beginning, their breakfast was full of even more incredibly dangerous things. To Laharl at least.

First, the moment he entered the living room, Telle came up to him fresh-faced and the first words out of his mouth were, "Ohh, what a morning, full of hope and brimming with light! Don't you think so, Laharl-kun?"

Barraged by words he hated, and on top of that hugged firmly and suffering warm kisses, Laharl's little remaining HP was taken away.

Far from regaining energy with the start of the meal, each jab chipped away at it.

A dish full of salad caught him off-guard thinking it had no decoration, but at the bottom was written the character for 'love' in bright red. When he tore apart the bread, there was a heart mark in the cross-section. There were neither breaks nor oversights.

I called Flonne a Love Freak, but these guys are on a different level. They're Love Warriors, Laharl felt deep down. *If I don't get out of here before I collapse, I'm done for.*

So thinking, Laharl hurriedly left his seat.

"Have you had enough already?" Elle asked.

"Yeah....." Laharl answered as though moaning, and then he staggered out of the house. Like that, he crossed the flower beds and headed for a meadow with no houses.

He found a large rock and sat down with a thud.

"Seriously, what are they trying to do? Do they mean to kill me?"

Thanks to the exercise, the shadows under his eyes had lessened, but his weariness seemed to have increased.

"No, that's definitely it. There's no doubt they're actually assassins, members of a rebellion."

"I'm telling you there's no way. Those guys, they just don't understand how much of a pain they are."

"That's probably right, huh. They're just a completely idiotic lot."

"That's *exactly* it."

"Yeah, that's right— I mean, wait a second!" Just now recognizing there was a voice behind him, Laharl turned around.

Standing there was a boy wearing a green bandana.

No, it was hard to tell because her blonde hair was short, but judging from how her chest stuck out, she was a girl. But, it wasn't enough to trigger Laharl's allergies to large breasts.

For me not to realize there was someone this close, being subjected to those love attacks must have blunted my senses, Laharl thought with a grimace.

"You're the Overlord?" the girl asked impudently. "You're smaller than I expected."

"Who the hell are you?"

"Ozone."

He thought that he had heard that name somewhere, and he remembered.

"Flonne's younger sister, that's you?"

"What, you've heard? That's right, I'm the unfortunate daughter and little sister."

"Somehow, you're different from what I pictured."

At Laharl's words, Ozone's brow furrowed deeply. "Of course. I left because I couldn't stand being in that house."

"You're not a Love Freak, too?"

"You're joking! Just thinking that I share blood with that lot makes my hair stand on end."

"Hmm, we agree on that." Laharl smirked. "Then, why are you here?"

"I just heard that someone had come from the Netherworld, and I came to see what kind of guy it was."

"I see. You wanted to meet me. Well, what do you think of me?"

"You're a weak little kid."

"What did you say?" This time, lines of anger appeared on Laharl's forehead.

"Even though you're the King of the Netherworld, you're fussing over those guys, and now you've run out here. It's unbelievable."

"A king has responsibilities towards those below him, too. Someone who only has his own way isn't an influential king." Saying something with such composure that would

have made Etna faint if she heard it, Laharl glared at Ozonne.

"You talking about the study of being a good ruler?"

"Hmph, I was a ruler from the moment I was born. There's no need for me to bother studying scholarship," Laharl answered indignantly, and he folded his arms, studying Ozonne's face.

Certainly having been told she was Flonne's sister, there were a lot of ways in which she resembled her: the shape of her face and her slightly upturned nose, and above all the color of her hair. But, the look in her eyes was different. It was close to that in Flonne's when she was angry, but it was even more intense than that.

"With how your family goes on about love and happiness, why are you against it?"

"Love, you say? What use is something that unreliable?"

"Oh? In that case, what do you believe in?"

"Money," Ozonne asserted bluntly. "Even though saving humans is supposed to be angels' principal duty, they just keep on dying, don't they? For all that, you can't feed them on love. It'd be better to give them money."

"For an angel, you're practical."

"I hate people who say things in pretense."

Looking at Ozonne, a bold smile came to Laharl's face.

"Hm. I like you." Smiling, Laharl clapped Ozonne on the back. "It's promising that there are quick-tempered guys like you in Celestia, too. It seems like I'll be able to realize my ambitions of dyeing Celestia the color of the Netherworld."

"You were thinking something like that?"

"No, I only thought of it now."

Seeing Laharl say that with complete seriousness, Ozonne burst out, "You're an interesting guy, you."

"So are you. I'll make an exception and let you call me Laharl."

"In that case, you can just call me Ozonne.⁵"

Smiling at each other, the two shook hands.

"It's about time I got back. It wouldn't be any fun having Etna and the others saying I ran away."

"Let them be, those guys."

"No, as the Overlord, once I accept a challenge, I can't run from it," Laharl said, and stood. "I'll be in Celestia for another few days. Let's meet again."

So saying, he returned to Flonne's house.

"Is that guy a masochist?" Ozonne tilted her head, not understanding. "Well, he's an interesting guy."

Chuckling, she folded her arms. It emphasized that she had a little bit nicer of a chest than Flonne.

Then she noticed a shadow moving at the very edge of sight, and she looked in that direction.

"Hm? A prinny, huh."

A poorly-made penguin was plodding closer to her. Just one. It was unusual for a single prinny to be outside on its own. Prinnies were creatures which worked in groups.

"Oi, you there," Ozonne called out to stop it, and the prinny walked closer. What was strange was that it had the number 9 burned into its forehead.

"What is it, dood?" For a prinny, its reply was somehow challenging.

⁵ The two of them are agreeing to call each other by name only, without honorifics like -san.

"Are you a Netherworld prinny?"
 "That's right, dood."
 "Did you come with Laharl?"
 "That's right, dood."
Netherworld prinnies, are they really this impudent? Ozonne thought.
 Fundamentally, prinnies could not go against their masters. Because they were made to work for their atonement, they had to earn points, and if they defied their masters, it might worsen their evaluation. In Celestia, this was nearly always absolute.
 "Hey, what's Laharl like in the Netherworld?" Ozonne asked unintentionally. She was a little curious, but she hadn't meant to go in that strange direction.
 "What's he like? He's always the same way, dood."
 "Hmm. If he's like that, I guess he has friends."
 "Well, I guess there are Etna-san and Flonne-san, dood."
 "Flonne is....." The look in Ozonne's eyes changed.
 Seeing that, a shrewd light flashed in the prinny's eyes.
 "That's right, he's especially close with Flonne-san, dood."
 Although the prinny had answered with difficulty before, its attitude had changed suddenly and assertively, but Ozonne did not notice.
 "Doesn't he hate love?"
 "Although His Majesty says this or that, he likes love, dood. He may have been influenced by Flonne-san, dood."
 "Oi, tell me more."
 "All right, dood. But, what I tell you is confidential, dood."
 "Yeah, I get it."
 At Ozonne's reply, the prinny smirked momentarily.
 However, Ozonne still did not notice, and continued to listen to what the prinny had to say.

2

"Did you go somewhere, Prince?" Etna asked, having come to meet Laharl at the entryway when he returned to Flonne's house.
 "I just took a short walk," Laharl answered with a face that said it was nothing, but he had already taken damage. Even now, he had noticed a poster reading 'A Bright Future' hanging in the entryway.
 Thinking he must not lose, he recovered himself and said, "I met Flonne's sister."
 And, Flonne came running out from the kitchen.
 "Ozonne!? Where was she?"
 "An empty field nearby. She's an interesting one."
 Without listening to the end of Laharl's remark, Flonne ran outside. But, seeing no one there she retraced her steps and asked Laharl as though it were hard to say, "Did she..... say anything?"
 "Well, apparently she came to get a look at my face."
 "Laharl-san's?"
 "Yeah. After all, I am the King of the Netherworld. I should have given her my

autograph or something."

As he spoke, Laharl began writing in the air, wondering how best to write his signature. That not being what she had meant, Flonne pressed him.

"How did she look? Did she seem well?"

"Yeah, she was in full health. How do I put it, she was the complete opposite of you."

Her shoulders slumped and Flonne nodded. "Yes, that's right. As far back as I can remember, she always rebelled against our parents, and started fights with me for no reason. I don't have any idea what bothers her—"

"Somehow I think I get it." Etna smiled weakly at her.

"What is it?"

"It's love."

"Huh?"

"She doesn't like love, that has to be it."

"What!?"

"She said that to me," Laharl said. "The world is money, she said."

"There is no way an angel would say such a thing!"

"I'm telling you, she said it," Laharl said, unusually timid in the face of Flonne's intensity.

"She must be ill! She's suffering from an angelic fever or something and she isn't thinking straight!!" Her fists clenched, Flonne looked up at the ceiling and nodded.

"That's it. I must heal her!" Flonne raised her voice, and then she ran to her own room.

"She's off in her own world again." Etna shrugged her shoulders as if there were no helping it.

"I'm going to see Lamington. I won't be back until tonight." With that, Laharl went outside, all but fleeing.

Having just missed him, Elle poked her head out from the kitchen. "My, I wonder where Laharl-san went?"

"He said he's going to the Seraph's place."

"Oh, that's too bad. And I went to the trouble of making lunch."

Sighing as though deeply disappointed, Elle returned to the kitchen. In her hands was a round pancake. A peace sign was drawn with care in the sauce and vegetables.

"Man, he seems to be taking quite a lot of damage," Etna murmured as she watched Laharl's retreating back.

"Yep, maybe it's about time I stabbed him in the back. But, seeing the Prince that weak is fun, too," Etna said dangerously, and her tail waved back and forth in delight.

"Well! Welcome. Has something happened?"

Lamington received this abrupt visit, too, with a smile, and headed for the desk in his room.

"I thought I'd have tea or something. Are you working? If I'm interrupting, don't bother."

As he spoke, Laharl was already sitting down on the sofa. Lamington's desk was piled with a mountain of documents.

"No, you are welcome."

Still serene, Lamington rose from his chair, and came towards the sofa.

"There are a lot, huh," Laharl said in admiration as he looked at the stack of documents.

"Today is a light day."

"*That's* light?"

"Yes," Lamington replied with an unconcerned face. "I can look over that amount in two hours."

"You're joking, right?"

"No, I do not lie."

"But there are things you don't say."

"That's true." Lamington chuckled and went on. "Once you become accustomed to it, you, too, will be able to do this amount of work quickly. Krichevskoy-dono was the same way."

"My old man was my old man."

Just then a lower-ranking angel appeared bringing a pot and cups, and cake. Once he had poured the tea from the pot, he smiled brightly and departed.

Gesturing for Laharl to go ahead, Lamington relaxed onto the sofa.

The tea was black, and the cake was a fruit tart. The small fruits glowed white as though giving off a light from within.

Laharl stared hard at the black tea and asked,

"What is this called?"

"The black tea? It is an original blend called 'bright blossom.' It is characterized by its flowery aroma. If you put a little milk in, it is delicious. And those are my favorite bright cherries."

Laharl glared at the cake for a moment as though wondering whether it contained some trap, but in the end he firmed up his resolve, stuck a fork into it, and put it in his mouth.

"How is it?"

"Well, it's good." His tone said that it wasn't, but Laharl ate it up in the blink of an eye.

"I am glad. Bright cherries are the brightest fruits in Celestia. They have become a symbol of love and light."

"You, that was intentional, wasn't it?"

Laharl glared at Lamington with an expression of extreme displeasure. But, his question was simply evaded.

Once he understood Lamington had no intention of answering, Laharl changed the subject.

"By the way, what do you mean to do about Flonne?"

"Do?" Lamington poured a little milk into his black tea and brought the cup to his mouth.

"How long do you mean to leave her in the Netherworld?"



"That is right, isn't it? How long would be all right with you?"

"I'm asking *you*."

"It depends on you. I do not mind however long she stays."

"What do you mean by that?"

Without answering him, Lamington subtly changed the subject. "For Celestia, Flonne is the future."

Peering suspiciously at the other's expression, Laharl asked, "If Flonne's so important, why did you have her fall to the Netherworld?"

"It is unfortunate, but my authority was still insufficient. And there were quite a few who held animosity towards the young Flonne."

"I see. So you were trying to protect Flonne by making her a fallen angel."

At Laharl's words, Lamington nodded silently. "Even now there are many who object to interaction with the Netherworld. However, it is something that is necessary for the future. That is why I sent Flonne to the Netherworld, and had her meet you."

"Together with my old man."

"Yes."

"Hell, what meddlesome bastards." Laharl sipped his tea with a sullen face.

Smiling, Lamington again changed the topic. "Well, we spoke of it yesterday, but what number of people would be best?"

"Two or three would be good. If there are no problems, we can increase it."

"That is true, isn't it? Well then, I shall make the arrangements."

He added something to one of the documents, then threw it up into the air, and the paper became a dove and flew away.

As if he had done quite a task, Lamington lifted the tea cup to his mouth, and sank into the sofa. A calm smile on his face, he looked at Laharl.

"How are you finding Celestia?"

At Lamington's question, Laharl grimaced sharply.

"Is there some problem?"

"There aren't any problems."

"With that sort of expression, it does not appear that way."

"There still aren't any problems." No matter the circumstances, there was no way he could say that he was completely exhausted from those love attacks. "I'm thinking to return to the Netherworld tomorrow."

"Is that so? Please do not let this visit discourage you from coming again."

"I'm not discouraged by anything. And it's your turn to come next time."

"Indeed. It certainly is, isn't it? I shall intrude on you in the near future."

"I'll give you a warm, Netherworld welcome."

"Go easy on me." Lamington bowed his head slightly.

"Oh, yeah. There was something I wanted to ask you."

"About Ozonne, yes?"

"How do you know that?"

"I have my own information network."

He's just as shrewd as ever, Laharl cursed under his breath, and continued, "Are there others in Celestia who think like that?"

"When one way of thinking becomes a world's accepted viewpoint, those who think differently naturally appear."

"Is that right?"

"Vulcanus was one. Krichevskoy-dono was another."

Grimacing at his father's name, Laharl asked in return, "And you're saying Ozonne is another?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean to do?"

"I have no intention of eliminating heresy. I will let her do as she will."

"Can you maintain the order of Celestia that way?"

"If it crumbles at this rate, then it means that Celestia has no right to exist."

"Your confidence is enough to impress me."

At Laharl's words, Lamington just bowed silently without saying anything. Instead, smiling, he opened his mouth. "May I ask one more question?"

"Yeah, go ahead."

"What do you think of Flonne?"

"Flonne?"

Lamington nodded, smiling.

For an instant Laharl's face was stunned, but he quickly shook his head. "I've never thought about it."

"I am in no hurry. I do not mind how many years it takes, so please give me an answer."

Leaving his cup and standing, Lamington turned his back on Laharl. He looked out the window, and like letting out a little breath he murmured, "Yes, there is time, until my life fades..."

3

The following morning, Etna came out of Flonne's room.

When she had tried to sleep in the guest room, Flonne had called out to her, and somehow or other she had wound up sleeping in the cramped room.

"Prince, are you awake?" She knocked on the door to Laharl's love-riddled room.

"Uhhh....."

From within the room escaped a moaning voice. She thought she heard the tottering footsteps of a zombie walking, and from the pitch dark room, Laharl appeared. Dark circles showed beneath his eyes, and his feet staggered.

"Wahh, you're a completely rotten zombie!"

"Don't be an idiot! As you can see, I'm the picture of health!!" As he answered, Laharl planted a hand on his waist and smiled.

"Oh, you're overdoing it!"

"What do you mean, overdoing it? There's no way I would collapse at this level."

He talked big, but his exhaustion was worse than the prior day.

Having come out of the kitchen, Flonne looked at Laharl's face and immediately raised her voice in surprise. "What's the matter, Laharl-san? Are you sick?"

"I'm not sick," Laharl answered with a groan.

Even though I've known her this long, she still doesn't understand my allergies?

That frustrating thought rose up as if to weigh on his already exhausted spirit.

"It must be because of the change in environment. Shall I Heal you?"

"Ahh, enough already!"

Shaking off Flonne's hand, Laharl went outside.

"Ah, Laharl-san!"

When Flonne hurriedly went after him, Laharl had already spread his scarf like wings and flown off.

"Ahhh, you've been dumped, Flonne-chan," Etna said teasingly.

"Dump— That isn't it!"

"You think? In that case, maybe I'll go play with the Prince."

Etna gave Flonne a meaningful smile and went dashing outside. She spread her wings, and from the air, Etna took a moment to confirm the direction Laharl had flown. Then she swiftly went after him.

When she recognized Laharl's figure below her and started to descend, she saw another figure.

"Huh? He's already got company....."

Hurriedly retracing her course, she landed in the shadow of a rock a little ways away. From there she took stock of the situation.

"Hahaa, that's Ozonne-chan, isn't it?"

Her hair was short, but it was of a like color to Flonne's, and that was plenty for her to make a guess.

"Hmmm, I definitely get a different impression from her than Flonne-chan. If I had to say, she seems more like me. Though she has more of a chest than I do," Etna muttered, a little vexed.

Meanwhile, the two of them began walking together.

"I'll just spy on them." Grinning, Etna began following after the two.

The two sat down atop a rock lying in the meadow and fell into conversation.

Drawing near enough that she would likely be discovered if she got any closer, Etna pricked up her ears. But, although they seemed to be talking, she couldn't hear it.

"Guess I'll just have to get a little closer."

That brat, she's pretty shrewd, isn't she? Etna thought and, taking care, crept stealthily forward through the grass. When she had gone 10 meters, she was able to hear voices.

"Hey, when are you going back to the Netherworld?"

"Today or tomorrow. It isn't as though I have that much free time."

Even though he always does his work haphazardly, Etna retorted in astonishment.

"I see. That's right, huh....." Ozonne sighed.

Huh? She seems sad.

Even though it's been two days since you met him, Ozonne-chan, you've already fallen? That Prince, he's doing surprisingly well.

"Ah, damn it! And things were finally getting interesting!!" came Ozonne's frustrated voice.

Huh? Etna's shoulders slumped. *They seem more like guy friends, at that.*

She had a strange, depressed feeling like a wash of some disappointment.

"Mmm, even though it shouldn't have anything to do with me."

She made a troubled face, not understanding her own feelings. But, while Etna was troubling over it, the situation was progressing.

"Hey, you want to come to my house?"

"Yeah, all right."

The two leapt down from the rock and walked off.

Woah! Isn't this atmosphere a little dangerous!?

On the instant, Etna came alive.

Without a moment's delay, she started after them.

Ozonne's home was a single house very much on the outskirts. It wasn't certain whether it could really be called a house or not. To put it plainly, it was an abandoned building. The stones were crumbling apart here and there, and their shape changed with the weathering of the wind.

"So there are ruins like this in Celestia, too," Etna couldn't help muttering.

She was trying to figure out where Laharl and Ozonne had gone when she heard a voice from inside.

"This is some house." It was Laharl's amazed-sounding voice.

"In Celestia, you're fine to sleep outside. And there aren't any characters reading 'love' or 'friendship' anywhere here."

"That's true."

After some indication of them walking around, there came the sound of them sitting on chairs or something.

"This is the first time since I came here that I've been able to relax. I don't know what that Lamington guy is thinking either."

"Say, what sort of place is the Netherworld?"

"It's a more violent and dangerous place than here. Well, compared to Celestia, anyplace has to be more dangerous. This place somehow lacks any power, and there's no appeal. Though strangely there are those with power." Laharl's smile slipped as though Flonne's family had come to mind.

"I'd like to go see it. I wish I'd become a fallen angel. And not Flonne." When she said 'Flonne,' a considerable amount of feeling entered her voice. She seemed to hate her.

It seems like it'd be better not to tell Flonne-chan, not about this, Etna thought, very much unlike a demon. She didn't know what might happen, and she got the feeling that something bad would happen to her.

After that, she tried again to listen in on what was going on inside the house, but it was just a rambling conversation.

"Hmm, nothing's happening." Whatever she had been expecting, Etna seemed dissatisfied.

"Somehow I feel stupid doing this sort of thing. Maybe I'll go back," Etna muttered. She leapt up suddenly, turned a somersault in the air, and flew up.

Unlike in the Netherworld, the sky in Celestia was crisp and dry. That part made her body feel light. It felt good to move her wings with ease.

"Just this much, this is good."

Even going into the city, there was no bustle of stores or shops, but rather it was orderly and without energy. It was pretty, but something was missing.

"Yep, the Netherworld is better after all."

Etna enjoyed the sky into the afternoon, and afterwards she landed at Flonne's house.

"Etna-san, where's Laharl-san?"

Flonne's question greeted Etna once she alighted in the entryway.

"He might not be coming back today."

"Eh? Did something happen?"

"Mmm, with how things were going, I don't think so."

At her subtle wording, Flonne tilted her head. "What do you mean?"

Just then one of the prinnies came up. It was Number 9.

"Ah, Flonne-san, His Majesty said that he's staying at a friend's place, dood," he told Flonne as if incidentally.

"Ah, hey!" Etna opened her mouth reflexively, but she was already too late.

"A friend?" Flonne asked.

"He said something like Ozonne-san, dood."

"Ozonne!?" On hearing that name, Flonne reacted with a twitch. "That girl, why is she with Laharl-san.....?"

"They really seemed like they were getting along, dood. They were even holding hands, dood."

Etna wondered if that were true, but the prinnies equipped with conscience circuits weren't supposed to be able to lie. *No, now's not the time for that*, she thought, and looked at Flonne.

Flonne's expression was tight somehow. Her mouth twisted into a frown.

"Where is Ozonne?"

She's mad, definitely. Etna could hear the anger in Flonne's voice.

"They went towards the ruins directly south of here, dood."

"The place we played when we were children," she murmured under her breath, and with a determined face Flonne turned around and spread her black wings.

"I'm going out for a bit!"

"Where are you going, Flonne-chan?"

Not hearing Etna's question at all, Flonne flew off.

"Man, however you look at it, that's the behavior of a woman who's had her man stolen," Etna murmured in amusement. It definitely seemed like a demon's nature to enjoy conflict.

"Now then, it's gotten interesting." Etna clapped her hands, and then she, too, leapt up to follow Flonne.

Left behind, Prinny Number 9 waited until he could no longer see Etna's figure, then turned and walked off in the direction of the town.

After walking for about 20 minutes, he reached the town, and scanned the vicinity with a restless eye. He appeared to be looking for something.

The angels walking in the area did not pay the slightest attention to prinnies.

If one looked closely, there were other prinnies hurrying back and forth. They were Celestial prinnies. Their penguin forms were coming apart, but their hue was brighter, and their expressions softer.

Prinny Number 9 walked along a street where shops were lined up, and found a group lined up along the street.

The prinnies numbered 1 through 8 were seated on chairs in front of a shop, eating *dango*. It was obvious at a glance that they were different from the Celestial prinnies working hurriedly.

Number 9 stepped up and addressed his comrades.

"I finally found you, dood."

Prinny Number 3 swallowed a *dango* and asked, "Where did you go, dood?"

"I have orders from His Majesty, dood."

As Number 9 spoke, they pressed their faces closer, and they all formed a circle

and stood listening to his words.

When Number 9 had finished his explanation, they all raised their voices at once in surprise.

"Is it all right to do something like that, dood?"

"Those are the orders, dood." Number 9 said in a voice with no enthusiasm, and in contrast the eight prinnies came to life and began showing excitement.

"Let's do it, dood!"

"The supplies are over there, dood. Decide on your respective shares and carry them, dood."

Number 9 pointed out some boxes stacked under the eaves of a nearby building to the eight excited prinnies.

"It's been a while, hasn't it, dood?"

"I'm excited, dood."

Talking eagerly, the eight prinnies each shouldered a box of about the same size as himself and dispersed throughout the town.

Watching this, a smile came to Number 9's face.

"This should do it..... dood." Number 9 nodded, and gave a nod to the eaves from which the boxes had vanished. "Things are going smoothly, dood."

Something strange stood before his gaze.

A cylindrical thing shining silver. At a height of about 80 centimeters, it was about the same level as a prinny, and its width was 20 centimeters around. Feeler-like things extended to either side, and from its middle two rods stuck out like legs.

It gave the impression of a poorly-made doll. Where there should have been a face, there were only three holes. The upper two were round, and the one below was triangular.

And, the upper two holes shone. They were probably eyes.

That figure rose softly, and without a sound it flew away.

"Well then, this is it..... dood. I'm looking forward to seeing the face that Laharl makes..... dood."

Number 9 laughed boldly.

Next Time's Preview



3: A Sisterly Quarrel

1

"Ozone! You're here, aren't you!?"

Having been caught up in talking to Laharl about the Netherworld, the afternoon had passed before Ozone realized it. She was just about to rise to her feet, thinking it was about time to eat something, when a voice called from outside.

She grimaced at the voice she hadn't heard in so long, and went outside the ruined building.

With a cold smile, Ozone planted her hands on her hips. "I was wondering who it was, and it's my Love Freak older sister."⁶

"What do you mean, 'Love Freak'?"

"Laharl said it. That he couldn't get away from the Love Freak."

"T-that's—"

Flonne couldn't find her words, and Ozone continued to bombard her.

"He said it was so hard to breathe in your house, he couldn't stay there. Laharl was exhausted."

"Don't refer to Laharl-san so familiarly!"

"He doesn't belong to you, does he, Sister? I can decide myself how to address him."

"However you want to address him, Laharl-san is the King of the Netherworld, isn't he!? You've lost your manners!"

"This is Celestia." Ozone stuck her tongue out as if to say that fact was irrelevant.

"A-anyway! Return home!!"

"Why?"

"Why, well, because Mom is worried about you, too."

"Huh, really? Even though in the few hundred years since I left home, she didn't once come looking for me."

"That's surely because she had faith in you."

"Even though, when you became a fallen angel and fell to the Netherworld, she seemed plenty worried."

"T-that's—" Flonne stammered.

Seeing that, Ozone sneered and continued, "That's what? 'Because they love me more,' or maybe 'Because I'm prettier' or 'Because I'm a better person.' Well, which is it?"

"It isn't anything like that!"

"Oh, I see. Even if you're thinking it, you can't say it, you mean? Sister, you're so well-mannered."

"Ozone, if you say any more than that, I'll get angry." Flonne's white skin was growing increasingly red.

"Oh, scary." Ozone covered her face jokingly, and then she continued in her provocative tone. "What'll you do if you get mad? Sister, *can* you get mad?"

Flonne clenched her fist and raised her voice. "I- I get mad!"

Flonne, who seemed ready to punch her sister at any moment, and Ozone, who

⁶ Ozone mockingly refers to Flonne as *onee-sama* here.

stood with her arms folded and her face calm.

The tension rose between the two.

That was when Laharl poked his head out from within the ruins. "What's going on, Ozonne?"

"Laharl-san!"

"W-what, Flonne?"

Flonne was looking at Laharl with a face that said she had found him up to some mischief. "Now, we're going back."

"Going back, to where?"

"My house." Flonne held out her hand to beckon him.

But, Laharl only groaned, and made no move to leave his spot.

"What is it?"

"I'm not going there."

"Why not?"

"You can ask me why, but....."

Laharl seemed to be having trouble saying it, and beside him, Ozonne lent a hand.

"Laharl is saying he doesn't want to. You wouldn't force him, would you, Sister?"

"Force him—"

"However I think about it, you're the one who's saying rude things to the Overlord."

"Wha....."

While the dumbstruck Flonne stood quivering, Ozonne took Laharl by the hand and thrust her chin towards the house.

"Go ahead and let her be. Go inside. I'll make you something."

"Is that okay?"

"It's fine, leaving her like that."

Smiling, Ozonne turned her back to enter the ruined house. Flonne's strong voice flew at her from behind.

"Wait, Ozonne!"

"What?" said Ozonne. She, too, answered challengingly.

"Flonne, won't you give it up? This isn't like you." Laharl addressed Flonne intending to soothe her, but doubtless he hadn't thought it would bring the brunt of her attention on him. When Flonne's gaze fell sharply on him, he inadvertently averted his eyes.

"What is this? Even you're taking Ozonne's side, Laharl-san?"

"I wouldn't really call it taking her side—"

"If you're not with her or against her, then please shut up!"

"Uh....." Under that sharp gaze, Laharl shut his mouth. "Wait a second," he muttered. "I'm the King of the Netherworld. Why do I have to shut up?" But in spite of that, he said nothing in reply, and couldn't even look at Flonne.

"That's pretty pathetic."

At hearing that sighing voice, Laharl turned around in surprise.

Chin in hand, Etna was sitting atop a ruined pillar.

"E-Etna!? How long have you been there?"

"Since Flonne-chan and Ozonne-chan started arguing."

"That's the whole time, isn't it?"

"Yep." She bared her fangs in a grin. "It's pretty interesting. I wonder how it'll turn

out?"

"Don't act like you're not involved!"

"But, I'm *not* involved," Etna answered in amusement, laughing through her nose.

"Kgh..... You're my underling, at least worry about your boss."

"I don't want to worry about you, Prince. No matter how many lives I had, it wouldn't be enough. It just doesn't pay."

"You've worried about me that much?"

Hearing that, Etna clapped her hands together and began to cackle. "As if. After all, you've lived up until now."

Laharl glowered at her. "You, are you playing with me?"

"You finally figured that out?" Etna laughed as she replied, and Laharl heaved a sigh as if to say 'enough already' and waved a hand.

"More importantly, look," Etna said, "it's pretty bad."

Etna was pointing to Flonne and Ozonne who glared at each other, standing stiff as statues.

"It seems like the girls are fighting each other over you, what do you think, Prince?" Etna teased Laharl.

"It doesn't seem that way to me at all."

"If this isn't fighting over a guy, then I wonder what is?"

The two girls in the confrontation glared at each other still without moving.

"Do they seriously mean to fight?" Laharl asked.

"Those two, they're more or less angels."

"Even angels at least have arguments between sisters." Etna shrugged her shoulders, and then the two moved.

They took their weapons from the palms of their hands, and they chanted spells at the same time.

"Mega Fire!"

"Mega Ice!"

The chanted spells struck precisely in the middle of the two, and they dispelled each other. The shock of their erasure spread through the area.

One moment later the blast struck Laharl, and whipped back his hair.

Having perhaps anticipated that their techniques would misfire, the two each leveled their staffs and switched to close combat.

With a solid clang, the two staffs struck against each other. As they were staffs with magical power, they gave off an incredible power just from clashing. That one strike sent a shockwave headed for Laharl and Etna.

"F-flonne's scaring me....."

"Well, that's the nature of women," Etna said smoothly, and taking the shockwave as if it were a pleasant, gentle breeze, Etna even began humming in



amusement.

They struck twice, three times, and once the two separated they put some distance between them.

"I won't show mercy, Ozonne."

"I won't care if you cry."

They levelled their staffs.

"Here I come!" Flonne said.

"Prepare yourself!" said Ozonne.

The two began chanting spells and prepared to attack.

"Prince, aren't you going to stop them?"

"Even if I said I would..." Laharl didn't seem up to it.

Etna leapt down from the pillar and landed behind Laharl.

"You're a man, aren't you? Don't grumble, here!" She shoved him hard from behind.

"Woah!"

Having lost his balance, Laharl tumbled out right into the space between the two. Tottering, he came to a stop.

That was when the two unleashed their spells.

"Ah!" Etna instinctively suppressed her words.

"Eh?" Flonne's eyes went wide.

"Wah!" Ozonne's eyes went wide.

As if they had arranged it, Giga Fire came flying from either side.

"Gwoah!"

Laharl took both attacks head-on, and, caught in the explosion, went flying straight up. He came falling enveloped in flames and trailing smoke, and he bounced twice, three times, and lay on the ground.

"Laharl-san!"

"Laharl!"

The two stopped what they were doing at the same time and swooped down to Laharl's side.

Pitch black, Laharl rolled around until after a while the fire was reduced to cinders, and hearing the two's footfalls, he sat up. First he turned his face towards the ruined building and pointed his finger.

"Are you trying to kill me!?" he demanded, glaring at Etna.

"Oh, no. It was just a spur-of-the-moment thing."

"I'll be damned if I get killed by a spur-of-the-moment impulse!" He raised his voice at Etna who was smiling and sticking out her tongue, and next he roared at the two leaning over him worriedly. "And you two!"

Flonne and Ozonne hung their heads.

"If you're going to quarrel as sisters, then do it more moderately!"

The two nodded meekly.

"Well, which will you take, Your Majesty?"

The moment Etna interjected, Flonne and Ozonne froze again.

Laharl glared at Etna again as if to tell her not to say anything unnecessary. But, the two in question started glaring at each other over his head.

"You two....."

Laharl was at his wit's end.

Just then, the sound of a great explosion rumbled from the direction of the town.

2

The explosion had occurred in the shopping district.

At first there was a small explosion in a back street, and a single house went flying.

After that, as if it had been a signal, explosions went off one after another in a chain.

The explosions spread in concentric circles, and the white-walled buildings that made up most of the town collapsed one after another together with a great noise. Black smoke coiled around the rolling white dust, and it turned grey as it stretched up into the sky.

In a few minutes, the explosions which had started in the downtown had spread to the districts with private homes, and nearly all of them were devastated.

At once the Celestial Host and prinny squads reported for duty, and once they grasped the extent of the damage, they went to help the injured.

The Celestial Host from up above, and the prinny squad trotted in carrying supplies.

"Even though we're soldiers, ne."

"Honestly, ne. For us to go helping people, ne."

Even in Celestia, prinnies complained. While exchanging words in a slightly more refined manner of speech, several hundred prinnies entered the downtown, which had been transformed into ruins.

"Wow, this is awful, ne."

"Really seeing it, it's an atrocity, ne."

Their round eyes opened even wider.

Close to 80% of the buildings had turned into mountains of rubble, and smoke rose from all over.

"Anyway, let's look for survivors, ne."

Following the direction of the Celestial Host up above, they began to search through the rubble. They removed the stones with shovels and pickaxes, and helped the civilian angels buried beneath out. Because they could indicate their presence with light, finding the survivors was easy, but getting them out was difficult.

Ten minutes after the search had begun...

Thirty or more survivors had been discovered. That there were few dead was because many had flown up to escape the explosions as they occurred.

This prinny squad, too, had already rescued three people.

Then, from the rubble close by, they could hear sounds.

"Is someone there, ne?"

When they called out, the sound of something moving answered them again. But, no light shone. Probably it was a fellow prinny, they thought.

"We're helping you now."

Under the command of the lead prinny, the rubble was carried away.

At last, two small figures were pulled out from within the rubble. The prinnies

exchanged looks. They looked the same.

"Huh? Who are you guys?" asked the Celestian prinnies.

"Oh no, dood!"

"Let's run, dood!"

As if they had been struck, the two prinnies turned themselves around and dashed off.

"That prinny just now, didn't he have something written on his forehead, ne?"

"It looked like a 4, ne."

"That's right, ne. A strange prinny, ne."

"Ah, maybe it's that, you know. Maybe he came from the Netherworld, ne."

"That's the topic lately, ne."

"So the Netherworld prinnies have numbers written on them, ne."

"The single digits must be important, ne."

"But, I wonder why they ran, ne."

"Who knows, ne?"

After they had discussed it at leisure, the prinny squad returned to their rescue efforts. There were still many civilian angels to save.

"This is another excellent style of destruction."

After they had heard the sound of explosions, Laharl and the others had immediately flown in the direction of the noise. Laharl spoke up in admiration when he saw the disastrous scene spreading below them.

The admiring Etna nodded in agreement. "It's artistic, isn't it?"

"It's got the touch of an abstract artist like Dehho,"⁷ Laharl added.

"Laharl-san, Dehho is an impressionist," Flonne corrected, looking surprised.

Laharl made a deliberately loud throat-clearing sound. "It's not a big difference."

"It's a huge difference! Well, not that I thought the Prince had eyes to look at art, though," Etna said, and Ozonne looked at her and Flonne with cold eyes.

"There's no problem in not knowing things like that."

"Yeah, that's right," Laharl agreed, puffing out his chest.

Etna let an ostentatious sigh. "For the Overlord, it's better to know, isn't it? From now on there's going to be more traffic with Celestia and the Human World, so you'll have to know the Netherworld well enough that it won't be embarrassing."

"That's right," said Flonne. "It's just as Etna-san says."

"It's like you to only be concerned with appearances, Sister."

"What do you mean?" Her voice hard, Flonne glared at Ozonne.

"Don't argue here!" Laharl pointed at the town and demanded of Flonne and Ozonne, "If you two are angels, then aren't you going to help the injured?"

"Huh? What's with you, saying something so nice?" Etna asked.

"Isn't it obvious? I'm going to have Lamington in my debt."

"Ah, so I see."

"If you understand, then get going already!"

Flonne and Ozonne met each other's gaze for an instant, but Ozonne immediately turned away with a hmph and flew down.

⁷ デツホ This seems to be the name of a Netherworld artist, and possibly a spoof on Van Gogh, whose name is written ファン・ゴッホ or Fan Gohho in Japanese.

Seeing that, Laharl gave a long sigh of relief as though he'd been released from something.

"I guess I'll go, too," he said.

As though he had chosen that timing, a voice called out from behind.

"Please wait."

When Laharl turned around, there was the figure of the Seraph with his four wings spread.

"Lamington-sama?" Flonne spoke up as though she had not expected this. It was unusual for the Seraph to appear in public.

"What is it, Lamington? You don't want to be in my debt?"

Lamington answered Laharl's question with another question. "What is the meaning of this, Laharl-san?"

"You're asking me, even though this has nothing to do with me?"

"Is that so? From the testimony of the townspeople, several prinnies were witnessed placing the explosives."

"There are prinnies in Celestia, too."

"Yes. However, there are no prinnies with numbers on their foreheads."

"Uh....."

As he had written the numbers himself, there was no way Laharl could deny this.

"Well? I do not want to think that you were the one who ordered it either."

"I don't do things without a plan!" Laharl answered, thumping his chest.

Suddenly, Etna raised her voice as though she had just remembered something. "But, because the prinnies are wearing the conscience circuits, they shouldn't be able to do anything on their own without your orders, right, Prince?"

"I-idiot! What are you saying!?"

"Is that the case?" Lamington asked in confirmation.

"I-it is....." Laharl answered, chewing on his lip.

"Which means...?" Lamington demanded coolly.

"I- I didn't do it!" In spite of himself Laharl backed away in the air, shaking his head.

"Please don't say things like a criminal who's been cornered," Etna said, her brow furrowing. "It makes you look pathetic."

"You're the one who provided the testimony to corner me!" Laharl thrust a finger at Etna.

"It's all right. It isn't as though Lamington-sama is saying this seriously," Flonne said to reassure him, but Lamington's expression did not change.

"No, I am serious."

"Lamington-sama....."

"There is no one in this Celestia who would think of destroying this beautiful town. There is only one who is capable of thinking of it."

"Be reasonable, you should remember that you've doubted one of your own followers before," Laharl said. "You can't have forgotten about Volcano."

"I told you, it's Vulcanus," Etna interjected.

"Even Vulcanus did not have any thoughts of harming Celestia." Lamington narrowed his eyes slightly and regarded Laharl. "Well, how is it?"

"Wait! I'll look into it so you just wait!!"

As though overwhelmed by that glint in his eyes, Laharl turned around and flew

down to the town which had become ruins.

"Now that I think about it, why do I have to look into this.....?"

Laharl's scarf fluttered as he flew, and from behind him came Etna's jeering voice.

"You lost."

"What did you say?"

"It's a major loss, too bad for you."

"Damn it....." Biting his lip, Laharl landed atop the rubble. "Anyway, it'll be fine once I prove that this has nothing to do with me. I'll search out the real perpetrator. Prepare yourself."

Even though there might have been victims buried beneath him, he walked rapidly without reservation.

"But, I wonder if the perpetrator would be in this place." Etna, too, mercilessly tread on the rubble as she walked, and surveyed the surroundings through the dusty atmosphere.

"The criminal returns to the scene of the crime. It's an inviolable rule!"

"He's acting on only a cursory knowledge of the subject again, this kid," Etna muttered.

"Did you say something?"

"Nope." Etna played dumb, and just then she heard a voice.

"Ah, if it isn't Etna-san, dood."

Several prinnies came running closer.

"And His Majesty is here, too, dood."

The bustling prinnies who gathered were six altogether.

"You lot, where have you been at a time like this!?" Laharl demanded.

"We were doing just as you ordered, dood!" The prinnies clapped their chests, practically asking to be praised.

"Ordered?"

"That, dood." As one, the prinnies pointed to the mountain of rubble.

"What did you say...?" Laharl's temple twitched.

"We were told to destroy the town, so just as you said, we *really* destroyed it, dood." Prinny Number 7 puffed out his chest triumphantly.

"Wait a second. Who gave you those orders?"

"Your Majesty, dood."

"I never said anything like that."

"Eh? We heard it, dood."

"From who?"

"Umm, Number 9, dood."

"What did you say!? You believed orders on hearsay?"

"But, we *have* to obey Your Majesty's orders, so we can't tell lies either, dood."

"That's right, dood. There's no way he could tell a lie about Your Majesty, so we believed it, dood."

Because of the conscience circuits, it meant that they could not do anything without Laharl's permission.

"Oi, Number 9, get out here!"

Laharl raised his voice, but the prinnies only compared the numbers on each other's foreheads. Certainly among the six prinnies here, there was no prinny with the number 9 written on it.

"You lot, don't you know where he is?"
"We don't know, dood," the six prinnies said together.
"Where did he go!?"
Then, having been silent up until then, Etna reluctantly began to speak. "Prince, probably, well, maybe—"
"What?"
"Since there's basically nothing left in the records about the prinnies' past lives, I can't be sure, but..."
"But what? What are you trying to say?" Laharl asked in annoyance.
"That, that was Kira."
"What did you say!?"
Kira— He was Laharl's cousin, who from birth had possessed his twin sister Shas as a ghost. Previously, he had tried to kill Laharl and failed. He had been exorcised thanks to Flonne and been reborn as a prinny.
"There was a prinny I had my eye on since he was a newcomer, but anyhow there's no real individual difference between them, and eventually I just lost track of him." Etna laughed.
"Just lost track— There's nothing 'just' about it!" Laharl shouted at her. "You lot, get going and look for Number 9!"
"Roger, dood!"
The prinnies were about to run off at his orders, but Laharl called out to stop them and made one more demand.
"The rest, Numbers 1 and 3, where are they?"
"They went to another place, dood."
"Where?"
"Umm—"
All the prinnies racked their brains.
"Ah, I remember, dood." Number 6 clapped his hands, and on the instant sounded the boom of an explosion. "The Seraph's house, dood."
"What!?"
Laharl looked in the direction of the explosion, and his forehead spasmed.
However he looked at it, smoke was rising above the hill where Lamington's house was.

3

"This is terrible."
Laharl spoke up in admiration, having arrived at Lamington's house, which he had visited just the day before.
The magnificent white-walled building had been so completely destroyed as to be artistic. The private room into which Lamington had invited Laharl was buried under rubble, leaving no trace of it, and the documents which had piled up were scattered everywhere.
On witnessing the terrible spectacle not of the building but of the surrounding flower beds, Flonne raised a cry.

"Ahh! How awful!! Lamington-sama's flower garden!"

"Those flowers are everywhere, aren't they?" Etna said lightly. "Bring some from over there and plant them, and that'll be the end of it."

"Flowers embrace the feelings of the person who raised⁸ them. It isn't that simple a matter," Flonne chided Etna, knelt down, and tenderly touched the broken stems of the *yuie* flowers.

"But, can prinnies use magic this powerful?" Laharl asked.

"It isn't magic, Laharl-san." It was Flonne who spoke, her voice full of certainty.

"What do you mean, Flonne?"

She stood up and walked closer to the building, and nodded as though what she saw confirmed it.

"I believe it was a bomb."

"A bomb, you say?"

"Yes. The smell is different. The missiles fired by giant robots and the weapons used by *sentai* heroes have it, too."

"Not the *otaku* stuff again." Etna shrugged her shoulders teasingly.

"I am not an *otaku*! It's love directed towards things!!"

"And putting that simply, it means *otaku*."

Just as Flonne was about to make a retort, they heard voices and footfalls from the opposite side of the hill.

"Etna-saaan!"

"And Your Majesty!"

Two prinnies came running. On their foreheads were the numbers 1 and 3.

"So they really were here....."

Laharl slapped a hand to his forehead at the prinnies running and triumphantly holding both hands aloft, and he couldn't be any more exasperated.

"We did i—"

"You idiots!"

Laharl made a fist and thrust his right arm out. A force the shape of his fist went flying towards the prinnies and mowed them down.

"A strike." Etna clapped her hands.

"Laharl-san....."

Sometime without Laharl noticing, Lamington had come to stand behind him. Surprised, Laharl whirled around.

"W-what?"

"I believe it is in my nature to be gentle and never to lose my presence of mind."

"T-that's probably true." Laharl gulped down saliva.

"However, I am not confident that I can remain calm having lost even my own house."

"M-make an effort for me," Laharl said humbly,⁹ attempting to pacify him.

From Lamington's expressionless face, he could not determine the level of his displeasure. He seemed to have concluded that it was wise to avoid provoking him as much as possible.

"I'm going to question the culprits now." Laharl turned back to the eight prinnies.

⁸ Flonne is using a verb typically used to talk about raising children, rather than growing plants.

⁹ Laharl doesn't speak any more politely than usual here, but he does use the verb *kureru*, which makes it sound more like he's asking a favor instead of demanding it.

"Oi, you lot!"

"What is it, Your Majesty?"

"Where is Number 9?"

The eight prinnies looked at each other's foreheads and then tilted their heads.

"How did you destroy everything?"

"With these, dood."

From the air before his eyes, Prinny Number 5 pulled out a mass of about the same size as his own body. They may have been the lowest ranking demons, but they could use this level of magic. The thing was unornamented, and shone a dull silver.

"What is that, that huge box?"

"Uwah, that's amazing." Flonne spoke up in a hushed voice, sounding impressed as she peered at the thing that had been placed at Laharl's feet. Etna made a similar comment.

"Huh, if I sent these things it might be easier and more effective than magic. Maybe I'll forget stabbing him in the back and use these next time."

"Did you say something?"

"Nope, not really."

Laharl shot Etna's oblivious face a glare, then returned to his interrogation of the prinnies.

"Well, where did you obtain these?"

"Number 9 gave them to us, dood."

All of them nodded.

"He was loaded up with a lot of them, dood."

"If we had that many, we'd be able to conquer Celestia, dood," the prinnies said excitedly without any sign of timidity.

Laharl made a sour face, turned a timid glance on Lamington, and immediately turned away.

During the interrogation, Flonne had knelt down and carefully inspected the bomb, but suddenly she furrowed her brows.

"Laharl-san, this is strange."

"What is it?"

"I haven't seen this even in the human world."

"What does that mean?"

"There's no sign of welding. It looks like a technique surpassing that of humans."

"What did you say?"

"Now that you mention it, dood....." Prinny Number 4 murmured as though he had suddenly remembered. "I saw Number 9 together with a weird, short thing with long arms, dood."

"Its entire body was silver, dood."

"I saw the face, dood. Its eyes were huge, dood."

The evidence leapt up one thing after the next.

"Small, long-armed, and silver-colored, with big eyes?"

"Don't tell me, there were humans standing on either side holding its hands and swinging them,"¹⁰ Laharl said with a distasteful expression.

"I know! It's an alien, isn't it!!" Flonne clapped her hands together, beaming.

"You, you're leaning in that direction, too?"

¹⁰ I guess he's thinking of E.T.

"Flonne-chan, you're becoming more and more the *otaku*~"

Laharl and Etna sent cool stares at Flonne.

"T-that isn't it!"

"Then, how is it?" Etna asked.

"I-it's....."

With Flonne mumbling, Etna followed up with another attack. "Love towards things— Aliens don't qualify, do they," she teased.

"It- it's love towards space! It's space love!!"

"You're getting more and more suspicious, you know." Etna shrugged her shoulders hopelessly. "By the way, where's your sister?"

"I don't know anything about the likes of Ozonne."

"She's your sister, isn't she? What happened to that love you're always talking about?"

"Laharl-san told her to go provide aid, so maybe she's still there and not coming back."

"Well, she's an angel, so she's going to help," Etna said, and in the sky they could see a white figure. "Look, we brought her up and here she is."

Her white wings spread, she descended from the sky directly towards them.

"Ozonne, what is it?" Flonne called out to her, but she only approached swiftly without giving any response.

Seeing the sword she held in her hands, Flonne and Etna finally reacted.

With the sword levelled, Ozonne thrust forward in a straight line.

All at once, everyone in range flew out of the way.

Immediately afterwards, Ozonne crashed into where they had been a moment ago. Dust flew up with a great noise.

The prinnies were knocked over like bowling pins.

In the place Ozonne had assaulted, a crater had formed just as if a meteorite had fallen.

From its center, Ozonne swayed into sight. As though she had been hit by the shock herself, her footsteps were strangely awkward. Even so, she levelled the sword and came walking straight on.

"Stop it! Surely this isn't the time for that!!"

Without even responding to Flonne's cry, she shortened the distance. There was no expression on her face.

"Something's off," Laharl said.

"I get the feeling I've seen this somewhere before," Etna said.

While Etna searched her memories, Ozonne seized one of the bombs the prinnies had left behind in both hands and raised it over her head.

"Stop that!"

Without paying any heed to Laharl's cry, Ozonne hurled the bomb. What was more, she threw it at Laharl.

"Uwoah!"

Laharl tried to escape it, but unluckily his foot slipped and he pitched forward. There the bomb fell.

The bomb detonated with a boom. In the blink of an eye, there was another crater.

"Prince, have you passed away~?" Etna called into the densely rising dust.

"Like I'd die!" With a cough, Laharl crawled out from the edge of the crater.

"So you survived, huh," Etna murmured, sounding disappointed.

"Don't kill me off!" Laharl yelled at Etna, and then he shifted the brunt to the approaching Ozonne. "You, what are you trying to do!?"

But, still giving absolutely no response, Ozonne held her sword aloft.

"She isn't listening, is she," Etna said.

"Grrr, I'm not taking this calmly! That was an attempted assassination of the Overlord!!"

At once Laharl leapt back and avoided the attack.

"That's too bad, that it was an attempt."

"You'd be all right with that!?"

"Eh? Whoever does you in, it's fine with me. As long as I can gracefully take over the throne, there's no problem."

"Weren't you going to steal the throne with your own power?"

"I've never said that. It's just that there wasn't anyone besides me thinking the same thing," Etna answered nonchalantly.

Even while they spoke, Ozonne had been closing the distance between her and Laharl.

"I guess there's nothing for it."

Just as Laharl was about to pull out his sword—

"Ah—!" Etna cried out suddenly.

"W-what!?"

"There's an antenna sticking up!"

Etna was pointing to Ozonne's head. A slender rod extended from it, and whenever she moved it swayed from side to side. It was obviously suspicious.

"I remember seeing this somewhere before," Laharl said, but as he spoke he had his hands full avoiding Ozonne's slashes, and didn't have time to pursue the memory.

"Flonne-chan, the antenna!" Etna shouted instead.

"Right!"

Ozonne wasn't watching her surroundings, and Flonne approached Ozonne from behind. She drew her staff and held it aloft.

"You won't ignore me and go after Laharl-san!"

With a yell, Flonne swung her white staff levelly, aiming for Ozonne's head.

The moment the antenna broke with a snap, Ozonne stopped moving like a doll whose strings had been cut. Like that, she gave in to the momentum of her sword's swing, turned halfway around, and collapsed face-up.

"I knew it was strange that she denied love. It was because of this artless antenna, wasn't it?"

"I don't think that's it," Etna said.

"Up until a little while ago, she didn't have that antenna," Laharl said.

The two of them shook their heads.

Flonne picked up the antenna and made a troubled face.

"Well?" Etna asked.

Flonne hummed and after she had carefully looked it over, she said one thing:

"This is a terrible design."

"That's not the question!"

"Ah, but, I remember seeing this somewhere before." Flonne tilted her head.

And, just then—

"That's too bad, dood. So she failed..... dood."

Together with that regretful voice, a small shadow appeared from the other side of the crater.

4

"Ah, it's Number 9, dood!"

All together, the prinnies pointed.

"Don't call me by number, dood!" Prinny Number 9 shouted, flapping both arms.

At the appearance of the true perpetrator, Laharl glared with a face of displeasure.

"You trying to show off?"

"Hmph, in this form I can't really show off..... dood."

"Nope, the way you're talking isn't that flashy either."

The prinny planted a hand on his waist and thrust his other arm at Laharl. "Both of those things are your fault for making me become a prinny..... dood!"

Finding his appearance so funny she couldn't stand it, Etna burst out laughing.

"Laugh while you can, dood." Number 9—Kira glared at Etna challengingly.

"If you apologize, I'll let you off with only an additional 1000 years of unpaid manual labor. There's no way that you, a prinny, could rival me, the Overlord. I'm showing you compassion; you should be grateful," Laharl declared pridefully and incredibly condescendingly, and he walked closer to Kira.

But, Kira stood his ground and glared up at Laharl.

"You shouldn't take me lightly, dood."

"You intend to put up a futile resistance again?"

Smiling scornfully, Laharl began chanting a spell.

Faster than Laharl could finish his spell, Kira lifted one hand and raised his voice. "Come, dood, Vijan!"

A tremor boomed through the ground, and Laharl's body shook.

"What?"

Laharl cut his spell short and looked around him. A fissure ran at his feet.

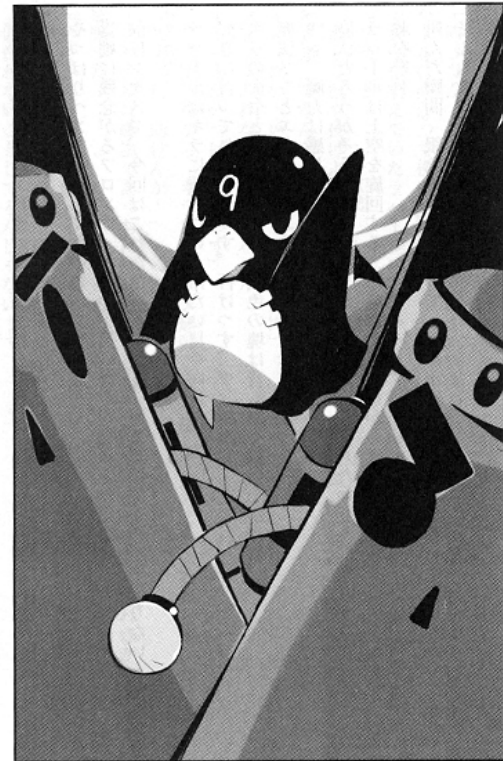
From that fissure something came flying out with an incredible speed. Just in time, Laharl spread his scarf and flew up, and the thing brushed his toes as it flew past.

"What is that?"

It was flying about freely, giving off a silver light. It wasn't much different in size from a prinny.

Two metallic masses alighted in front of Kira.

They had cylindrical silver bodies and two cylindrical legs, and arms like tentacles. Fundamentally they were both the same. The difference was in their heights and breadths. One was slightly taller than a prinny, but the other was not even half that. In the opposite way, one was slimmer and the other broader. Their volume may have been about the same.



"Ah, those are the short things we saw, dood!"
All together the prinnies pointed fingers saying 'me, too, me, too.'
"Those are?"
"You must be surprised, dood! These are mechanical life-forms, the Vijan, dood!"
At Kira's cry, Flonne's shoulders slumped, crestfallen.
"Ehh, so they weren't aliens....."
"You really did have weird expectations, didn't you, Flonne-chan," Etna jabbed, laughing at the earnestly disappointed Flonne.
"Before it was Shas, and now these? Hell, can't you do anything without relying on someone else?" Laharl turned deploring and cold eyes on Kira.
"You can say what you like, dood. Go, Vijan!"
At Kira's order, the two silver-colored masses immediately flew up without a sound.
"Magic?" Etna murmured, and Flonne shook her head.
"But, I don't sense any magical power."
"Whether it's magic or not, if the results are the same, it's no big deal," Laharl said, following the two bodies circling the sky with his eyes. "Here they come!"
The instant he shouted, the two bodies drew silver trails and came at Laharl from different directions.
"As if I'd take an attack like that!"
Laharl prepared a counterattack.
"My magical power might be weaker, but I can still do this much, dood!" As he shouted, Kira pulled a bomb out of the air in front of his eyes. He held it aloft in both hands, and threw it at Laharl.
Chanting his spell, Laharl caught the bomb perfectly in his arms.
"Owah!"
In a panic he tried to fling it away, but there wasn't enough time. A great explosion erupted, and expanding a barrier on the spur of the moment, he somehow escaped the danger.
"Just how many of those do you have!?" Laharl shouted, wreathed in smoke.
"I still have quite a lot, dood." So saying, Kira pulled out bombs steadily one after another and threw them like arrows.
Laharl was thrown this way and thrown that way by the blasts, and as he was tossed about he yelled to Etna, "You lot, aren't you going to help!?"
"No~, those bombs are scary." Etna put both hands together and shook her head in refusal.
"Don't act like that, it doesn't suit you!"
Just after his shout, a thick silver light landed a direct hit to Laharl's jaw. The short, fat Vijan had rammed him.
Having taken an uppercut in mid-air, Laharl spun once and struck the ground.
"Honestly, even though he usually just shows off by himself," Etna muttered as she began chanting magic to back him up.
The long, slender Vijan came flying at her from behind.
"Etna-san!"
At Flonne's cry she jumped out of the way and avoided the body blow by a hair's breadth.
"These guys, they don't have any bloodlust, so you can't sense them coming."

As she rolled, Etna watched the Vijan fly away. Immediately afterwards she let loose flames, but it didn't appear that she did much damage.

"I guess there's nothing but to hit them directly."

From an alternate space she opened in the palm of her hand, Etna took out the spear Gungnir. She swung it once, producing a shockwave, and first it knocked over the interfering Kira.

"Lie down there for a bit. I'll look after you later."

As she checked the Vijan's advance with magic, she spread her wings and flew up, and Gungnir flashed at the approaching Vijan.

A solid clash sounded, and Gungnir was repelled.

"Hey, what is this!? It's ridiculously hard." As if her fingers had gone numb, Etna shook her hand and grimaced.

"Etna-san, let's go at the same time!" Etna raised her voice and chanted a spell.

"Got it!" At the same time, Etna, too, chanted a spell, and levelled Gungnir.

"Mega Fire!"

"Mega Ice!"

The two spells of completely opposite natures enveloped the Vijan at the same time, and set off a great explosion.

"Did we do it?" Etna said.

Instinctively, the two leaned forward in anticipation. But, from out of the smoke came flying a silver-colored mass at great speed.

"No good!"

Etna reflexively twisted her body.

The Vijan which graced past her with a ferocious speed was undamaged.

Meanwhile, Laharl was also having trouble.

He had tried both Fire and Ice, but he couldn't tell whether it was working or not.

"In that case, it's Mega Star!"

Laharl's arm glowed with a blue light, and a pale flash flew towards the Vijan.

The moment it hit, the fat Vijan's movements stopped as though it had frozen.

"All right! Etna, Mega Star works!"

"Roger, Prince!" Etna answered to Laharl's shout.

She took aim for the Vijan flying around near her. "Take this!" Etna swiftly invoked a Mega Star spell, and held Gungnir aloft.

"This is it!" Etna said.

"This is it!" Laharl said.

At the same time, Etna and Laharl struck down the two Vijan with Gungnir and the Overlord's sword.

At roughly the same time, the two Vijan stopped moving completely, and fell to the ground. Precisely like toys which had run out of batteries.

"What a pain." Laharl clapped the palms of his hands together.

"But, they didn't launch an attack." Flonne looked disappointed.

"So it wasn't an attack when I took a headbutt to the jaw?"

"It's not that, I mean laser guns or missiles. They didn't combine or transform either. Even though they look like robots. It's strange."

"You're thinking like an *otaku* again. These things didn't have those kinds of abilities. That's all," Laharl asserted, and he walked towards Kira.

"Now, this is as far as you go." Laharl thrust the Overlord's sword at Kira. "This

time, you want to be erased so completely that you can't even reincarnate?"

Without replying, Kira glared at Laharl.

"If that's your intention, then it's inevitable."

Laharl brandished his sword and aimed it for the body containing Kira's soul.

Just then, a deep sound burst up from out of nowhere and resonated in his body.

"W-what?"

Thinking that maybe something else was coming out from beneath his feet, Laharl looked down. Flonne, too, looked about anxiously, but Etna looked somehow excited. The prinnies could no longer stand and fell to the ground, and their round bodies just rolled about.

Watching them, Kira suddenly began to laugh.

"It's the end for you all now, dood. And for this Celestia, too..... dood."

"What did you do, Kira!?" Laharl raised his voice sharply.

Just then, the sky suddenly darkened, and their surroundings began to be enveloped in a dim light.

Next Time's Preview



4: Celestia's Decisive Battle

1

Then, the darkest day in Celestia began.
The clouds surged and were quickly stained black.
As far as the eye could see, thick clouds covered everything, and night fell.
Sometimes lightning ran within the clouds, and they shone blue-white.
The body-shaking tremors grew stronger and stronger.
The top of a huge silver mass appeared, attempting to break through those evil clouds.

It was so large that its shape couldn't be determined. It just looked like a broad slab whose surface seemed to curve ever-so-slightly. As more of it appeared, they at last understood that it was a flat, circular shape.

Flonne pointed at the sky and shouted excitedly, "Laharl-san, it's a UFO, a UFO!"

"I guess there's no denying that, huh."

Laharl furrowed his brow and nodded, but in contrast Etna shrugged her shoulders and shook her head.

"Actually, do you know what UFO means?" she put in. "It's Unidentified Flying Object. But if it's right in front of your eyes, I don't think it's unidentified."

"It doesn't matter what it's called," Laharl said.

"I think it does."

"Then what would you call it?"

"A flying saucer."

"We don't know if it's a saucer or not," Flonne said.

"None of that matters, dood!" Kira shouted, irritated with the three who stood arguing over trivialities despite the unusual phenomenon. "I went to the trouble of creating this tense atmosphere, and you don't feel any of it, dood!?"

"Well, the arrival scene is just going on and on." Yawning widely, Etna pointed at the sky.

Although it covered most of the sky, half of the body of the saucer still had not appeared.

"The other problem is it's too big."

It had to be flying at great speed, but because their perception of its scale was so off, it only looked to be moving slowly.

Then, having been a spectator during the battles until now, Lamington stepped forward and stood before Kira.

"Where were you until now?" Laharl asked.

"I hid my presence completely."

"This guy is unexpectedly cheap."

Without paying any mind to Laharl and Etna muttering complaints behind his back, Lamington posed a question.

"What are you thinking?"

Even before the Seraph, Kira smirked without any timidity. "My part is finished now, dood. From this point on, it has nothing to do with me, dood."

"What do you mean by that?"

"My task was to buy enough time to create a dimensional rift so that the main force could arrive, dood. With a battle that showy, even the Celestians' magical power would be hindered and they wouldn't sense the appearance of a rift, dood."

"And in exchange, you had these guys remove your conscience circuit," Laharl said. He sent the two fallen Vijan flying with a kick. They rolled off sounding just like empty cans.

"You've figured it out exactly, dood." Kira applauded and smiled coldly at Laharl.

"You, you're making a fool of me." Laharl's forehead twitched.

Etna looked at him and, apparently seeing there was no way around it, asked in his stead, "By main force, do you mean those?"

"What else but them, dood? It's these Vijan, dood."

"What's their goal?"

"They came to conquer Celestia, dood. And the Netherworld and the Human World while they're at it, dood."

"I knew it, they're aliens, aren't they!" Without a thought for the situation, Flonne's eyes brightened, and she took hold of Laharl's shoulder beside her and shook him.

"Laharl-san, there are aliens, and a spaceship! It's amazing!!"

"However you look at them, I don't think these are people,"¹¹ Laharl said.

"Laharl-san, you mustn't discriminate based on appearances!"

"But they *aren't* people," Etna interjected.

"But, that's a real weakness," Laharl said to Kira.

"What is, dood?"

"If I say I'll kill you, those guys will stop attacking, too, right?"

"It's no use, dood. They have nothing to do with me, dood. They removed my conscience circuit. I made a distraction. That's the end of our fifty-fifty contract, dood," Kira declared to Laharl without any hesitation.

"Anyway, this will be the end of you all, dood. Prepare yourselves, dood." Kira smiled coldly.

Lamington turned his gaze on Kira. "It would be best if you did not underestimate Celestia's strength."

Smiling serenely, Lamington slowly spread both hands.

In response, several hundred white forms flew up all at once from the direction of the town at the bottom of the hill. Their white wings made their white robes flutter, and it gave the appearance of white flowers blooming. As could be expected with the light of the sun obscured, their brightness stood out. However, they carried spears and swords.

"Ah, the Celestial Host's come out." Etna turned a glance on Laharl.

Flonne's eyes shone. "In a situation like this, smaller spaceships will come out of the mother ship and stage a counterattack!"

"You can say that, but... Even I don't know what aliens would be thinking."

"Ah, they're really coming out," Etna said.

From the mother ship which even now couldn't be fully seen, something like a black mist gushed forth.

"Those aren't spaceships," Flonne said.

"Those, those are Vijan," Etna said.

"They're so small, they look like minnows," Laharl said.

¹¹ The word for "alien" is 宇宙人 *uchuujin*, literally "space person," which is probably why Laharl makes this remark.

The swarm of Vijan went for the Celestial Host. In the sky above, they met from either side, and here and there were scattered flashes. Hostilities had begun.

"Prince, aren't you going to help?"

"The enemy's just really huge. It shouldn't take any effort."

Laharl had decided to look on from above, and Kira watched him with a bold smile, his eyes shining.

The battalion of angelic soldiers which had taken off divided into five units in the sky.

They rose headed directly for the mother ship, but however high they climbed, they did not seem to get any closer.

Meanwhile, something approached from the mother ship.

"Spread out!"

At the command, the Celestial Host spread out all at once.

What had flown out from the mother ship was a group of Vijan. The little specks that looked just like a school of silver minnows came closer. The difference was that there was no buzzing sound to hurt the ears.

At last the vanguards clashed with each other.

Flashes of light flickered, and they perceived that the Celestial Host had commenced magical attacks against the Vijan. In return, the Vijan sent the angels flying with body blows.

Lights flashed with a pop-pop-pop like fireworks, and ten or more seconds later the sound of the explosions reached them.

The battle continued, and it couldn't be clearly determined how circumstances would turn out.

Suddenly, Flonne raised her voice. "Wah, they've started combining!"

When they looked, several of the Vijan were gathering together. They became the same size as the angelic soldiers. At a quick glance, their numbers did not seem to have decreased much. The number of Vijan was just uncountable.

"But, they aren't changing much....."

Certainly, their size had changed, but their shape hadn't.

"Now a mysterious ray is coming out of their eyes!"

From their enlarged eyes a beam came out and cut down the Celestial Host.

"There's no mysterious sound wave, is there....." Flonne gave away her dissatisfaction with the soundless beam. "If they don't transform more definitively, and destroy things impressively, it's no good!" the former angel railed unexpectedly, raising up her fist.

Seeing Flonne's reaction beside her, Etna spoke up with a smirk. "Hey, Flonne-chan."

"What is it, Etna-san?"

"For a little while the Celestial Host has been doing nothing but getting beaten and falling."

"Yes?"

On the tail of her question, angelic soldiers came falling and crashing to the ground nearby like insects being done in by mosquito-repellant incense.

"Flonne-chan, is it okay for you not to go help them? Or so I was thinking."

"Ah....." At once Flonne pressed the palm of her hand to her mouth.

"I- I was just thinking maybe it's about time I went!"

"She was *definitely* just fascinated by the aliens, this fallen angel," Etna muttered quietly, turning her face away.

Flonne hurriedly made as if to fly off, but on looking at the sky, her legs froze again.

At last, the entire shape of the mother ship had appeared.

"So it really is a saucer."

As Etna said, it was certainly a perfectly round shape. It was so huge that its diameter was an unimaginable number of kilometers.

"I wonder how many Vujan are inside of that?" Flonne said.

"I definitely don't want to count them."

Flonne and Etna's conversation had gone off-topic.

And, having been a spectator until then, Laharl groaned, "This is going to be a harder fight than I thought."

"Don't you mean, the Celestial Host is losing?" Etna asked.

"Hmph, if they're like this in an all-out war, then they probably aren't anything much, these angels," Laharl muttered.

"Ah, Prince, are you thinking of invading Celestia now?" Etna replied.

"I-idiot! Even if he was thinking it, an adult would never say that!!"

"You really were thinking it, weren't you." Flonne scowled at the flustered Laharl.

"There's no way I would be thinking it!"

"Eh? Why is that?" Etna asked him in surprise.

"Who would think that angels are weak!?"

I mean, there's no way I could think that knowing how strong Flonne is!

Laharl desperately gulped down his words.

Meanwhile the battle was turning steadily worse for the angel's side.

The number of angels being shot down and falling began to increase, and the battle continued to create victims. The angelic soldiers and Vujan who had been shot down caused secondary damage, the number of destroyed houses and civilian angels crushed beneath them growing.

At the outset, it wasn't only the low-ranking angelic soldiers, but the senior soldiers could not help but go forth as well.

"There is no helping it. I suppose I shall go," Lamington said quietly, and spreading his four wings, he flew upwards.

"Those are some showy wings, huh." Grimacing, Laharl watched Lamington fly away. "Oi, Flonne. Is Lamington strong?"

"I haven't seen him fight either." Flonne shook her head. "After all, until the incident before this, there had never been any fighting in Celestia."

"That's for sure. Well, if he fell at one hit from my fist, then I don't think he can be anything much....."

Laharl hummed with his arms folded.

"Well, fine. I'll have a look at how Celestia's leader fights," Laharl murmured, looking upwards in anticipation.

Lamington flew up into the sky and dispatched orders to the Celestial Host.

It wasn't with words. Just as with his first order to sally forth, he sent them with his thoughts. When he had to go so far as to correct them with words, it went something like this:

"Form ranks. Don't be broken."

In response, the Celestial Host formed ranks in perfect order, and headed for the mother ship.

They informed him all at once about the enemy's power and the attacks they took. Lamington listened to all of it, understood it, and issued orders.

"Concentrate your Mega Stars. Break through the enemy and aim for the mother ship."

The now numerous ranks released Mega Stars simultaneously, and showered the Vijan descending upon them in a blue-white light. Once the foremost ranks had invoked their magic, without a moment's delay, the rank behind them stepped forward and unleashed a second attack. On and on like a Gatling gun, they continued unleashing Mega Stars.

The Vijan who took the attacks and stopped moving came dropping to the ground. Watching from below, it was like a downpour of rain.

However, the Vijan, too, piled on their attacks, and those who slipped through the Celestial Host's counterattack headed off to the destruction of the town. Their number was by no means small.

"Uwah, it's hopeless, isn't it~" As usual, Etna was enjoying herself.

"Laharl-san, please go help them," Flonne implored him.

But, Laharl's reply was blunt. "I don't want to."

"Don't you have any love—any desire to save anyone!?"

"This is Celestia. Lamington says that he's handling it, so it wouldn't do for me to help without him requesting it."

"But, at this rate—" Anxiously looking up at the battle in the sky, Flonne could not find her words. She could see that still many of the Celestial Host were having their wings struck and dropping.

"Don't you believe in Lamington?"

"Eh?" At Laharl's question, Flonne's eyes opened wide and she stared at the speaker of those words.

"If you believe in him, then watch." After this declaration, he added, "Well, if it turns out he can't win, then it's all right if I lend my strength."

"Because if you wait until the last moment, he'll owe you a bigger debt, right?"

"Y-yeah. That's it," Laharl said in agreement to Etna's words.

"He's as soft as ever," Etna muttered, turning her face away and covering her mouth.

"Did you say something?"

"Nope, nothing." Under Laharl's glare, Etna feigned ignorance and whistled.

"Hell....." Laharl gave Etna one more glare, and then looked up at the sky.

"Well then, what will you do, Lamington?" Laharl muttered as he carefully watched the status of the battle.

"This will not do."

Meanwhile Lamington was overseeing the battle's progress. And, concerned about the damage on the ground, he murmured in his perpetually calm voice, "It would not be advisable to let this drag on any longer."

Readying himself, Lamington turned towards the mother ship and flew off.

Just then, there came a call from below to hold him back.

"Please wait, Lamington-sama."

Those who had come up were the three Seraphic Guards—the highest ranking angelic soldiers who guarded Lamington. Their weapons, too, were significantly high-quality articles.

"We will go, so please do not overexert yourself."

They sought to somehow change his mind, but Lamington issued orders as though disregarding them.

"Unify the soldiers and direct their attacks."

"Do you intend to go no matter what, sir?"

"I have my own responsibility as a leader. And then—" Lamington abruptly turned his gaze to the figures below. "I have no wish to show unbecoming behavior before the King of the Netherworld."

"But, we cannot let our leader go by himself."

Hearing the determination in the voices of the Seraphic Guards, Lamington gave in.

"Well then, establish a barrier around me."

"Understood." The three bowed their heads and encircled Lamington.

"Here I go," Lamington said quietly as though he were just stepping out for a moment, and he drew Raijuu's Fang out of thin air. It was an incredibly dangerous sword whose edge constantly discharged an electric shock.

He levelled it, and with one flap Lamington flew out headed straight towards the mother ship. The three Seraphic Guards rose in position with him.

"What's he mean to do?"

From below, Laharl watched Lamington's actions with a grim face. "You don't think—"

"Lamington-sama!?" Flonne raised her voice reflexively as though she, too, had understood what he was doing.

Continuing to climb, Lamington scattered the advancing Vujan troops as though they were nothing, and pushed on towards the mother ship.

The three Seraphic Guards encircling Lamington began to revolve slowly clockwise around him. Following as he rose, they increased their speed, and soon it became impossible to perceive their figures. The Vujan, too, were overcome by their momentum and could not get close.

As their revolutions grew faster, the electricity released by Lamington's levelled sword spread to protect the four of them, and they all glowed a blueish white.

The four who had become a ball of light increased their speed even further, and were drawn into the mother ship.

"Geh....." Laharl groaned in spite of himself.

"It's appeared! Lamington-sama's Triplex Attack!!" Flonne cheered and pumped her fist.

"That's what that technique is?" Laharl asked.

"I thought of it just now." Flonne puffed her chest up proudly.

"Isn't it weird for it to be called a Triplex Attack when it's four people?" Etna said.

"It's fine, if it sounds cool!" Flonne insisted.

In that instant, a flash covered the sky. Lamington had plunged into the heart of the mother ship.

A few seconds later a great noise came crashing down.

The shockwave became a wind and blew down, and fell upon them so strongly it nearly snatched Laharl's scarf away. Two prinnies were even sent flying by the wind and went rolling off.

Flashes spread from the center of the mother ship where Lamington had attacked, extending like snakes in all directions. With a thunderous roar, the center exploded.

"Amazing!"

Laharl turned to the excited Flonne and pouted in displeasure. "H-hmph, my move is more amazing."

"Which special move do you mean?"

"W-wait and see!"

Laharl turned his back on Flonne and folded his arms.

"Oh Prince, are you jealous?" Laughing, Etna elbowed Laharl.

"What are you saying!?"

As if to drown out Laharl's voice, the explosive sounds continued.

"Ahh~, he's done it....." Etna said.

Lamington broke through the mother ship, and seemed to be commencing yet another attack. The sounds of destruction continued to roar.

"But, if that thing comes falling, won't that be the end of Celestia, too?" Etna said.

The mother ship was of such a scale that it seemed like it could crush all of Celestia. It would be precisely like putting the lid on a pot.

"Your Majesty, wouldn't it be better to run, dood?"

The prinnies had already cheerfully begun preparations to escape.

"Eh, we still have time," Laharl said, but he muttered in frustration, "In the end, I'm not making an entrance, huh."

"That's too bad. The role of the lead character's been stolen from you," Etna teased.

"Seriously, I don't even know why I came—" Laharl muttered, but just then he smirked. He shifted his gaze to the sky above and said to Etna in delight, "That might not be the case."

"Eh?"

Laharl was pointing at the mother ship.

Even looking from the ground, it was plain that a huge hole had opened up right in the center of the mother ship. However, it didn't appear that it had taken any damage. Its altitude had lowered, but that didn't mean that it was falling, but rather slowly descending.

It hadn't been destroyed at all.

"That's one sturdy ship," Etna spoke up, impressed.

"Hmph. If it wasn't, then I wouldn't make it my opponent." Laharl struck a hand to his chest and laughed loudly.

Even though Lamington continued to attack the mother ship and destruction continued all over, it did not fall.

Meanwhile the Vijan flying about the surrounding area were defeating the Celestial Host. The number of angelic soldiers and Vijan falling to the ground increased steadily. Because of the shock waves from the explosions on the mother ship, their falling grew to a typhoon greatly surpassing the earlier downpour.

"At this rate even if the mother ship doesn't crash, the town will still be destroyed." Laharl's expression had naturally become one of enjoyment.

"You're terrible, Laharl-san." Flonne looked at Laharl with eyes full of criticism.

"What's with you all of a sudden?"

"Why do you look like you're enjoying yourself? Even though so many people are being hurt!"

"Flonne-chan, that's a demon's natural reaction. There's no helping it." Etna seemed to be enjoying herself, too. "When you put destruction or battles in front of us, it makes our blood boil with excitement. That's a demon."

"But that's—!"

Her fists clenched, Flonne was about to protest, but Etna went on.

"However you say it, that's a demon, and that's the Prince, so if you deny that then that means you deny the Prince himself. Flonne-chan, can you do that?"

"I can't deny or affirm it....."

"Flonne-chan, before long you'll have to become a woman who knows the difference," Etna suggested teasingly.

And, just then—

"Something's coming this way, dood!"

The prinnies were pointing to a spot in the sky.

Laharl looked up, and he saw something several times larger than even the combined Vijan fly out of the mother ship and come falling towards the surface.

"What is that? Its design is different," Laharl said.

As it came closer, they were able to see its shape. Somehow it seemed similar to the small alien ships, but it didn't have the simple shape of the Vijan.

"I feel like I've seen it somewhere before, but....." Flonne tilted her head and seemed to be trying to remember something, but suddenly her eyes opened wide and she pointed at the ship. "Ah! That, that's mine!!"

"What the heck are you saying?" Laharl looked puzzled.

Flonne continued, sounding disappointed, "But, Laharl-san, you—¹²"

But, as if to interrupt her, a loud guffaw roared from the spaceship which had descended right before their eyes.

"Who is that, with that vulgar laugh!?" Laharl raised his voice, plugging his ears with his scarf.

At the same time, the spaceship's hatch lifted, opening a hole.

All of those present readied themselves.

Then, from inside a figure in a retro space uniform appeared with a loud laugh.

¹² She's cut off before reaching the verb, but the wording indicates Laharl did something for her.

"Finally, the boss makes his appearance. Who are you?" Laharl demanded, and the person in the space suit put his hands to his helmet.

He removed the helmet, and beneath it was a magnificently bald head. And a mustache.

"You're—!?"

The man nodded in apparent satisfaction at everyone's surprised faces, and glared at Laharl.

"It's been a while, boy."

But, Laharl only folded his arms and hummed.

"Uhh, who were you again?"

"Prince, look, it's that guy. The bald guy who was the Earth Defense Force's something-or-other."

"You shouldn't call him a 'bald guy.' You should remember his name— um?" As though unable to remember it either, Flonne tilted her head. "Umm, was it James-san?"

"No, didn't it have a sound like Cantan¹³ or something?" said Etna.

Etna and Laharl tried to remember it somehow. In contrast, Flonne quickly abandoned her efforts and changed the topic of argument.

"Umm, I can't remember, but anyway, that ship is mine!"

"Why is it yours?" Laharl said.

"Laharl-san, didn't you say that you were going to give it to me!?"

"Did that happen?"

"Hey! Don't just go taking my things!!" the bald man roared, his head colored completely red in anger. "Gah! That's enough already!! I'm General Carter of the Earth Defense Force!"

He took off and threw aside his space suit, and beneath it was a moss green military uniform. On the breast was a row of showy medals.

"Ah, come to think of it, that was the name, wasn't it," said Etna.

"You got it wrong on purpose, you brats!"

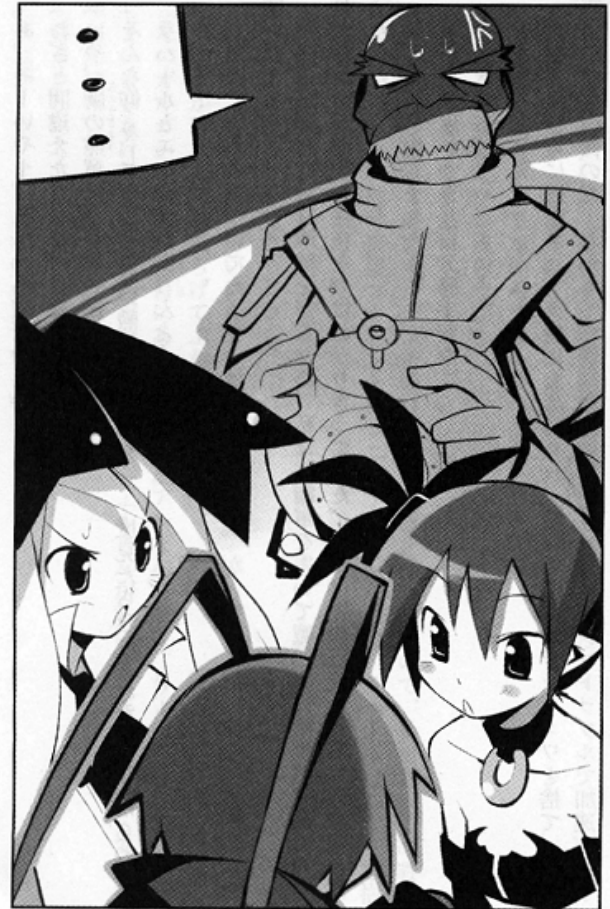
"No, I remembered it when I saw the medals on your chest," said Laharl.

"Because one look at that mess of gaudy, poorly-made medals, and you can't forget," said Etna.

Laharl and Etna nodded in agreement.

"Kgh....."

Realizing that he was being toyed with, Carter's fists shook. But, he quickly



¹³ Ironically, this is homophonous with Japanese for "easy." Also, I'm not convinced Etna doesn't remember.

thought better of it and opened his mouth calmly.

"In order to protect the Earth from you cursed demons, I led the Defense Force and struck a preemptive attack against the Netherworld. It was obvious that you all were dangerous beings. It was an opportunity to know God's justice."

"Hmm, his story's come out," said Etna.

"But, it's incredibly self-centered," said Laharl.

"Please let him talk!" Shaking her fist, Flonne shushed Etna and Laharl.

"But, attacked by you brats, and betrayed even by the angels, I abandoned the flagship Gargantua and at once withdrew to an escape pod. However, I was threatened by that ill-natured demon, and because of engine trouble I couldn't stop accelerating, and at 80% of the speed of light I was headed towards the edge of space....."

"Ill-natured demon? Is he talking about you, Etna?"

"As if. You mean it wasn't you, Prince?"

"I didn't have that kind of time."

"I guess that's right."

Because Carter had initiated Gargantua's self-destruct mechanism just before his escape, everyone had evacuated in a hurry. The Defender of Earth, Gordon, and Jennifer, who were unable to fly, had both been there, too, so Laharl had had to carry them and run. He had had his hands full.

"You don't think, it was *him*?" Laharl muttered distastefully.

"That part doesn't matter!" Flonne raised her voice as she normally didn't, and glared at the two. "*That* was the escape pod at Gargantua's nose. Although the shape has changed a little bit..... Laharl-san, you gave me the Gargantua, but it was destroyed."

"Wait a minute! He's the one who made it blow up," Laharl said.

"Anyway! That is mine!!"

"You girl! Don't go deciding my ship is your own!!" Carter shouted at Flonne, and then continued his story. "All right!? But, God did not abandon me!"

"He's prepared to attack Celestia, and he's saying things like 'God!'"

At Etna's interruption, Carter's eyes popped open and he yelled, "Idiot! Celestia is no more than a den of false angels!! The true God of space has told me to attack and destroy both Celestia and the Netherworld! And, I was given power!! These Vijan!"

"The God of space, huh," said Etna. "More and more, he's saying things he shouldn't in Celestia."

"As proof, these Vijan revere me as their Creator, and came here!"

"Didn't they get it wrong from your head being so divine¹⁴?"

"Shut up, girl!" Carter glared at Etna, and then he thrust a finger at Laharl. "Brat, at last your time has come¹⁵! I'm going to exact my revenge!!"

"Ah, that's right. So it's been a hundred years already," Laharl muttered.

Carter knit his brows. "What was that?"

"What, didn't you know? Since you invaded the Netherworld and had the crap beaten out of you, 100 years have passed in the Human World," Etna said.

"W-what!?" Carter was shocked.

"Yep, that's right. Gordon's not around anymore."

"While we're on the subject, the Earth Defense Force or whatever it's called

¹⁴ I'm assuming this is some sort of bald joke.

¹⁵ The Japanese idiom for this actually includes the phrase "hundredth year," triggering Laharl's next remark.

doesn't exist anymore either," Laharl said.

"Now it's 'Solar Defenders Gordon Z,'" said Flonne.

"Which means, you're the *former* General of the Earth Defense Force," said Etna.

"So that's it! With the Urashima Effect, 100 years have already passed back on Earth....." Carter murmured and his shoulders slumped.

"What's the Urashima light conversion¹⁶?" Laharl asked.

"That's not right, Laharl-san. It's the Urashima Effect. The closer you get to the speed of light, the slower the passage of time becomes. So, even though Carter-san is human, he doesn't seem to have aged much."

"What? I was sure that was the reason his head was shining so brightly."

"It was like that before," said Etna.

Carter, who had been listening to Laharl and Etna's exchange, clenched his fists and began to tremble.

"You brats! Saying whatever you like!!" Carter bellowed, and he struck his fist against the hatch with a slam. "I'm bringing all of my grudge to bear on you brats!! From here on I'll show you Hell!"

Then, he was about to press some switch.

"Who would just leisurely wait to be attacked!?"

Laharl chanted the spell for a Mega Star, and immediately released it at Carter. Not caring that his opponent was human, he mercilessly struck for a direct hit.

A loud bash sounded, an explosion boomed, and white smoke rose up.

"You're being showy about it~ After that there won't even be a trace left, will there, Prince?" Etna belatedly raised her voice.

But, beyond the clearing smoke was an unexpected sight.

"What?"

Five Vijan had created a wall and protected Carter. However, the Vijan were practically undamaged, and still hovered in mid-air.

While poised to press the switch, Carter froze with a smile of triumph on his lips.

"In that earlier battle, the Vijan completed an analysis of your attack pattern and power, and the types of magic and their strength. Well done, Kira." Carter nodded to Kira beside him.

"Leave it to me, dood."

Prinny Number 9—Kira had at some point climbed into the escape pod.

"You....." In surprise, Laharl whirled around reflexively and looked to where Kira should have been.

"King Laharl, your reign is just about at its end, dood," Kira laughed.

"Now die!" Laughing loudly, Carter pushed the switch.

"But, hasn't that mother ship about had it?" Laharl looked up at the huge saucer which was exploding here and there.

"You fool, you don't know anything. Watch!"

Just as Carter pointed upwards, a flash covered the sky. One moment later, an incredible sound roared as if to shake the ground, and a shockwave blew down upon them. A power unparalleled by the explosions until now assaulted them.

In the sky above, flames engulfed the mother ship and turned it into a sun.

"I'm watching, but?" With the shockwave blowing back her hair, Etna looked at

¹⁶ "Effect" is homophonous with the characters for "light" and "change." How Flonne can tell he has the *kanji* wrong, I don't know.

Cater with a blank expression.

"Lamington's finally done it." Squinting, Laharl, too, looked at the sky.

"That's just like Lamington-sama!"

Seeing Flonne cheering, Laharl glared at Lamington circling the sky, looking discouraged. *Why am I feeling like this?* he wondered, angry with himself.

"It's over now." Having lowered his gaze to Carter, Laharl smirked coldly. It was a look that said he had found an outlet to drive away this depressed feeling.

Suddenly Carter bent his back and began to convulse.

"He's started feeling sick?" Etna made a stunned face as if to say 'That didn't take long.'

But, that wasn't it. He was laughing. He seemed to need time to let out the laughs which shook him in spasms.

"What's so funny?" Laharl said.

"It's funny that for you brats, the beginning of your end has begun," Carter said. Then, he let out a roar. "Transform!"

"Transform!?" At that word, Flonne reacted intensely. Her eyes sparkled like anything.

Fragments shot out from the exploded mother ship in all directions. Then, the Vijan fighting the Celestial Host covered the sky completely. The fragments broke apart yet again, and in the end they were so small as to be like fog.

However, those fine grains each moved freely.

"Don't tell me, those are Vijan, too?" Laharl muttered in astonishment.

"So you've finally realized it. The mother ship was completely made up of Vijan." Carter let out a loud laugh, and spreading both hands he ordered, "Now, cover Celestia in darkness!"

The Vijan which had covered the surface of the sky increased their density, and covered the heavens precisely like an umbrella. The light of the sun was shut out, and immediately it became as pitch dark as night.

When the Vijan had completely covered the heavens, darkness had arrived. A space emerged where practically nothing could be seen.

But then, to Laharl and the others it was nothing unusual.

Even so, the Vijan still had numbers to spare. Carter shouted his next order.

"Combine!"

"Combine!?" Flonne's eyes sparkled even more brightly, and she clenched both fists in front of her chest.

The innumerable Vijan closed behind Carter, and one after another they began to combine.

"Watch! This is the ultimate Vijan-bot!!!"

"Vijan-bot!?" Flonne's eyes radiated like disco balls, and her clenched fists trembled in anticipation.

The escape pod which Carter and Kira had boarded rose without a sound, and then moved towards the head part of the robot that was taking shape.

In the darkness towered the completed body of the Vijan-bot.

The escape pod had been enveloped by the forehead and disappeared.

With a whirring sound, the robot's eyes flashed.

The Vijan-bot— An avatar of destruction with enormous fists and a body tens of kilometers high. It was so huge that from the ground the full picture could not be grasped.

"Oi, isn't that just an enlarged Vjian?" Laharl said.
The Vjian-bot raised its arms and levelled its iron-ball fists.
"How's that? Be amazed! It has fists the size of California!!" Carter said.
"What's a California?" Laharl asked.
Etna shook her head. "Who knows? Isn't it some unit of measure?"
"Take this! Super-dreadnought California Punch!!"

The Vjian-bot drew back its right arm and released it on the instant.

"Woah!"
Starting with Laharl, everyone who stood there leapt away. But, it was after all a fist with a diameter of several kilometers. Escaping it was not easy. However far they flew, they still felt that they were going to be hit.

The prinnies who were unable to get away were sent flying and disappeared into the distant reaches of Celestia.

Naturally, the hill where Lamington's house was and where the punch struck was completely eradicated.

Laharl and the others who had reached safety in the sky above looked down on the hill crumbling away, dumbfounded.

"What a thing." His breathing ragged, Laharl nevertheless watched the Vjian-bot with a voice of admiration.

"I-it's unforgivable!" Flonne shouted beside him, her fists clenched. "This..... This is—" Overwhelmed with anger, Flonne could not manage to get her words out.

"Go on, Flonne-chan!" Etna cheered her on.
Flonne thrust her finger towards the Vjian-bot. "Nowadays, do you think we're going to put up with that design!?"

"So that's it....." Etna muttered, her shoulders slumping.

"First of all, the design is too old! And there isn't any coloring!! On top of that, the name of your special move is the worst! At this rate no merchandiser is going to contract with you!!"

"What merchandiser would contract with invaders....." Laharl interjected in a low voice.

Carter's shout came falling down from far above. "Idiot! That was an ordinary attack!!"

"They're both at fault....." Laharl let out a sigh and took out his favorite Overlord's sword from thin air. "Anyway, I'll buy the fight we've been sold. I don't care if it's Vjian or P-chan, I'll teach them a lesson!"

He turned to face Flonne.



"I'll make up for Lamington's failure. Just watch, Flonne!"
 "O-okay!"
 Without even listening to Flonne's reply, Laharl spread his scarf and flew up.
 "Ahh~, the Prince is in high spirits. You cruel woman." Etna prodded Flonne with her elbow.
 "M-me?"
 "There's no one else here, right?"
 "I haven't done anything cruel."
 "They do exist, women like this who don't know what they themselves have done," Etna grumbled in a mutter full of murderous intent.
 "What was that, Etna-san? Please say it clearly."
 "You're the one who should speak clearly. If you said it clearly and completely already, I'd feel more at ease, too," she muttered.
 Then, Etna waved her hand at Laharl who had flown off.
 "Please finish him off properly. If the damage spreads any farther, it's just Celestia so it's okay."
 Flonne turned an angry gaze on Etna for giving such an irresponsible cheer, but without saying anything she returned a worried gaze to Laharl.

4

Celestia was covered in darkness.
 Thousands of years ago, after the battle with the Netherworld in which the gate to Celestia was shut up, in the first darkness that fell, the denizens of Celestia had shuddered with a fear surpassing anxiety. And now, like the booming pushing up suddenly, the terror assaulted them again. Earthquakes did not exist in Celestia.
 Something such as fear was, to the citizens of this foreign world, an unfamiliar feeling boiling up which they had never before felt. There were those who, unable to control it, ran off, and also those who fled recklessly into the dark cloud and were attacked by the Vijan.
 Flonne's parents, too, were assaulted by an indescribable fear.
 "Dear....."
 In the darkness, Elle turned anxious eyes on her husband Telle.
 "It's all right. We have Lamington-sama."
 At Telle's words, Elle nodded with a bright expression.
 "That's true, isn't it?" she said.
 "And Flonne and the others, too."
 "Laharl-san and the others will fight for us, too, won't they?"
 "Of course they will. They're such good children, after all."
 With a thud, another quake ran through from floor to ceiling, and the two jumped.
 It would not be strange for the house to crumble apart at any moment. In Celestia where there were no earthquakes, even the phrase 'earthquake-resistant construction' did not exist.
 Dust came fluttering down from the ceiling. They could hear a creak-creaking.
 "Let's evacuate, honey," Telle said.

"Our house is weeping."
"There's no helping it. It'll be all right if we rebuild it."
"No matter the time, it's courage, hope, and love, isn't it?" said Elle.
"That's absolutely right, honey."
Spouting lines that would have nearly made Laharl faint in agony if he heard, the two embraced each other tightly.

"For some reason, just now, a chill ran down my spine," Laharl muttered uncomfortably, wriggling his back as he flew along with his scarf.
In the break when his attention strayed, he was attacked by a beam shot from the Vijan-bot's eyes.
"Woah!"
Laharl dodged with agility and continued his ascent. He was aiming for the robot's head.
"If the one controlling it is gone, then this robot will be a good-for-nothing!"
He flew on with great speed, continuing to avoid the beam.
"But man, it's far."
He felt like however long he flew, he would not reach the head. Even looking at the body of the Vijan-bot, it was so big that he could not even tell that he was flying or whether he was making progress. Because there were no seams or anything, nothing to compare against, he had no sense that he was flying.
Abruptly he thought he felt something incredibly oppressive, and in that instant—"Uwoah!?"
Not comprehending at all what had happened, Laharl was blown away.
He shook his head and cleared his hazy senses. The Vijan-bot's body which should have been right there was far off. That being said, because it was a flat, wall-like thing, any judge of distance was a considerable approximation.
He had been sent flying by the Vijan-bot's body as it took one step forward.
"Its entire body is a weapon, huh....."
Because taking just one step forward meant advancing several kilometers, it was the same as colliding with a mass of iron advancing at several hundred kilometers per hour.
"And my goal's even farther away now!" Laharl spat, and he made as if to hit something, but there was nothing nearby. Even his enemy was several kilometers ahead.
"I'm starting to feel like I'm climbing a mountain." So muttering, Laharl fired himself up, again decided the Vijan-bot's head as his aim, and flew upwards.
In that moment, he took an attack to his entire body and was flattened. He suffered extreme G, and even Laharl's consciousness vanished into white for an instant.
This time he had been struck flying by a round fist closing in from the side.
Having lost consciousness, in the middle of his fall he narrowly regained it, turned halfway around, and recovered his balance.
"That worked, a little....." he spat, with the indication that it was far from 'a little.'
He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and there was blood on it. He spat blood and was about to fly off, when from behind a voice called out.
"Laharl-san."
"What is it?"

Having turned around, Laharl caught sight of Lamington and two of his Seraphic Guards. One of the Seraphic Guards was missing. He grasped the reason immediately. The remaining two were considerably beat-up. One of them had had his wings injured and could barely fly.

"One of you was done in, huh."

Lamington nodded silently, and then made a suggestion to Laharl. "Shall we combine forces?"

"What did you say?"

"At this rate we will do nothing but produce victims. Together—"

"I refuse!" Laharl replied immediately, glaring at Lamington. "Against this kind of opponent, I'm all that's needed!"

Then he beat his scarf and commanded, "There's no need for you to interfere! Got it!?"

With that, he flew up.

"That was a failure, wasn't it." Lamington watched Laharl go, and his expression showed a wry smile.

"How rude."

"He has his own sense of honor," he soothed the indignant Seraphic Guard. "Next time I will have to change the manner of my suggestion."

Lamington folded his arms with a worried expression.

"Before that, I shall watch how far he is able to go."

Then, he looked up at the Vijan-bot with a severe gaze.

"However, I wonder why those beings are following that human," he murmured curiously.

Meanwhile, Carter was irritated that he could not strike Laharl as he wanted.

"Hmmm, it's too big and can't hit him."

Although it actually had hit him, his opponent was so small that he was just unable to tell.

"All right, a change in tactics!" Carter shouted. "Vijan-bot, separate!"

In answer to his order, the Vijan separated all at once. Each Vijan which had composed the Vijan-bot broke apart for a moment, and reformed in succession.

In the blink of an eye, they became five bodies of exactly the same shape as the Vijan-bot. All at once their size had become smaller, and their overall height was one kilometer.

Naturally, with the problem of capacity, the surplus Vijan took up a formation surrounding them like tiny battleships.

"That isn't separation!" Seeing it from the ground, Flonne raised her voice.

"That was a division, that," Etna agreed in a cool tone.

"If you don't transform with more flash and flourish, then it's no good!"

"Yeah, yeah, I know." While clapping Flonne on the back and soothing her, Etna looked up at the speck-like Laharl. "I wonder if he'll be all right, the Prince."

Then Carter's shout roared. "Go, Vijan Force¹⁷! Beat down that kid!"

The Vijan squadron turned towards Laharl and plunged forward.

On hearing that voice, Flonne's temper flared up as hot as a raging fire. "There's

¹⁷ The word used here is 戦隊 *sentai*.

no red! And there isn't any blue or green or yellow or pink either!!"

"You're just saying whatever you want, jeez." Etna was at her wit's end. "Even though he went off in high spirits, at this rate, against this enemy, the Prince won't be rewarded."

Grabbing Flonne, who was brandishing her fist and seemed about to rush for the Vijan-bots, by the collar and pulling her back, Etna gave a sigh.

"I wonder if we should go help him already."

She thought for a moment on what to do.

"Well, I guess once his situation's hopeless. That might be easier and better."

Grinning, she returned her gaze to Laharl.

"They're coming out in groups again."

Laharl looked at the considerably smaller Vijan-bots and smiled broadly. *It'll be easier if they're smaller. The number isn't a problem*, he thought.

"Well then, which should I take out first?" he said in anticipation, and decided to do away with the lead first.

As he flew for the head, he began chanting a spell. In proportion to his opponent becoming smaller than before, the attack range of its fists had shortened. Thanks to that, even as he approached, he didn't have to worry about suddenly being knocked flying.

He approached until he was outside the range of its fists.

"I'll send you flying right off! Giga Star!!" Enveloping his fist with magical power, he immediately let it loose. "This magnitude is different from that restrained magic earlier!"

A blue brilliance flew straight headed for the first Vijan-bot.

The moment he saw it hit, the tiny Vijan which had moved out into the surroundings closed in, and formed a wall.

"Ah....."

The wall of tiny Vijan was completely knocked down, but thanks to it, the magic was weakened to half strength as it was on the verge of hitting the Vijan-bot.

The blue-white light which had driven into the Vijan's torso extended tendrils of electricity and was about to explode. Each Vijan which composed the robot was destroyed haphazardly, but other Vijan flew into the destroyed parts and filled in the openings.

After the brilliance had disappeared, the Vijan-bot stood there completely undamaged.

"Damn it! Don't interfere!!"

Losing his temper, Laharl ignored his opponent's distance and dove in.

"In order to show the difference between me and Lamington, I have to win completely here and look cool doing it!"

With a bellow, he released a string of Giga Stars.

One after another he struck the walls of Vijan that were thrown up, and continued to advance.

"Move!"

He destroyed eight walls, and at last in front of his eyes was the figure of the Vijan-bot.

"Prepare yourself!"

Having reached out about to release a Giga Star, what came out of Laharl's hand was only a faint pop.

"Damn it....."

There were limits to magical power. Laharl had used up his power all the way to its limit.

Then the five Vijan-bots advanced on him with a thud-thud. Behind him yet another wall of Vijan stood in his way. Even if he were to run, he couldn't.

"You bastards, five against one is cowardly!"

Surrounded and having lost a path to escape, Laharl clenched his teeth.

"I don't want to hear that I'm 'cowardly' from a demon. Besides, the basis of heroes of justice has always been group beatings!" Carter shouted triumphantly.

"That's why, I hate battle groups!"

"Once I've taken care of you, and killed all the Celestial Host, I'll make Celestia mine!"

"Like it'll go that smoothly!"

Laharl swiftly feinted that he was escaping upwards, then turned his body and headed down. From there, there was plenty of space between the robot's legs.

But, just as he was about to slip through, the knees drew near.

Taking a kick from the knees, Laharl flew up, and then he was attacked from three sides—straight on, an uppercut from below, and finally one attack from above.

He was crushed, tossed upwards, and knocked down.

"Ugah!"

With the final attack, the worn-out Laharl was knocked down to the ground, and he sunk deep into the earth.

"Did you think a boy like you could win against me!?"

Carter's loud laughter came crashing down.

Having crawled out of the hole he himself had dug, it was all that Laharl could do to roll out of the way to avoid being trampled.

"I- I can't win....."

Laharl collapsed onto his knees and looked up at the Vijan Force.

5

"All right, Vijan Force, go! Reduce Celestia to ashes!!"

Carter's triumphant shout thundered through the pitch dark Celestia.

The Vijan-bots turned towards the town and commenced their invasion.

Forming ranks, the super-gigantic robots had every house crumbling just from their footsteps, and angels were thrown up and flew into the air. With the beams shot from their eyes, they turned the surroundings into a sea of flames in an instant.

It was as if a scorching Netherworld beach had appeared in Celestia.

"Look, look at this power! I'll become the king of the world!!"

Carter let out a loud laugh.

Laharl could only watch this powerlessly.

"Damn it....." He struck his fist into the ground.

After all my big talk, it turns out I wasn't able to do anything. Laharl bit his lip

and cursed his own lack of power.

Then, he thought he heard footsteps from behind, and he was addressed by a quiet voice.

"Are you all right?"

"You again....." he said, sounding annoyed as he looked up at Lamington. "I thought I told you I didn't need any help."

"No, that is untrue. Can I not request that you work together with me?"

Dubiously, Laharl looked at the other's face, whose expressionlessness surpassed calm.

"What did you say?"

"Celestia is on the brink of crisis. It needs your strength."

"Hmph." Laharl stood up, tottering, and as if to say that there was no helping it, he gave a cool nod. "If you're going to keep saying it, then it's no use. I'll lend you a hand."

"Thank you." Smiling, Lamington bowed his head.

"Well then, what'll we do?"

"Unless it is a magic more powerful than what we have used until now, we will not inflict any damage."

At that suggestion, Laharl furrowed his brow. "You want to use the keepers?"

"There is nothing else."

"I'd rather not, but there's no helping it."

Lamington looked at the tottering Laharl, stretched out a hand about to treat him, and then stopped.

He had realized that Flonne was running closer.

"Are you all right, Laharl-san!?" Flonne looked at Laharl, her voice worried.

"These wounds aren't serious."

He tried to act tough and hide it, but Laharl's wounds were considerably deep.

"I'll heal you now."

"I told you, I'm fine."

Easily holding down Laharl as he tried to push her away, Flonne scolded him, "That won't do!"

In the blink of an eye, Laharl was lying down with his head resting on Flonne's lap.

Any argument was futile, and Flonne chanted a Mega Heal and put her hands to Laharl's forehead. In a flash his wounds closed, and he was healed.

At Flonne having gotten so close, Laharl stiffened. To the extent that he himself found it strange, he had lost the energy to resist.

"Now, let us replenish your magical power."

Lamington took the opportunity to call his Seraphic Guard, and before Laharl could say anything, the Seraphic Guards transferred their magical power.

"I'm not thanking you."

At Laharl's blunt words, Lamington answered with a smile that said he'd expected them. "Of course. Because I, too, am doing this for Celestia's sake."

Having somehow or other recovered with the two's assistance, Laharl leapt to his feet with a proud hmph.

"Well then, let us begin," said Lamington.

"Flonne, stand back."

Laharl turned to look over his shoulder, and Flonne was clenching her fists forcefully.

"Laharl-san!"

"What?"

"Those poorly-designed robots, please take them out!"

Etna waved from behind her. "Prince, do your best, okay?"

"You, are you seriously saying that?"

"Look, it's the honest truth. I wouldn't be able to beat those things, so I'll have to have you do your best, Prince," Etna said, smiling. It was about the same as if she had said, 'Die for me.'

"Just watch."

Leaving the two with that, Laharl faced the approaching Vijan Force.

"We summon the spell keepers!"

Laharl and Lamington put their voices together.

Lamington closed his eyes lightly, spread both hands, and stretched them in front of him as if to embrace something.

"Earthen Giant Sigma, come!"

Laharl looked ahead as though glaring, and thrust his fist upwards towards the heavens.

"Space Demon Genesis, emerge!"

In order to make use of the most powerful magic, they needed to summon the beings called the spell keepers. They existed in order to establish the limits to the use of this foreseeably great power, and to protect the users and their surroundings.

Sigma was the first to appear. He was a clumsy mass of rock. Although he was called a giant, he was smaller than the Vijan-bots.

Genesis was the next to appear. On the outside it was like a poorly-made dragon, and it was characterized by its huge eyes.

"Thanks."¹⁸ Genesis greeted Laharl with a cheerful voice incongruous with his face.

"Strike them down with the full extent of your power!"

Genesis glanced at the Vijan, and grinned. "It'll be costly."

"I don't care!"

"Thank you. Well then, here I go."

Genesis joined in with Laharl's spell incantation and amassed power, and all at once unleashed it.

"Tera Star!"

At the same time, Lamington's summoned Sigma also released his technique.

"Omega Star!"

The two highest level spells intertwined, ran across the face of the darkness-shrouded Celestia, and headed for the towering Vijan.

"Go!" Laharl shouted as if to pass on his intent.

The blue-white flash enveloped the surrounding Vijan as it pressed on, surrounding them in *coils*, and then crashed into three of the Vijan in the center.

In that moment, a flash burst out, and the world was dyed a perfect white.

Because of the destruction and explosions surpassing understanding, neither sight nor hearing were any use at all. Only, they could understand that within the barriers of the

¹⁸ This is a shortened version of a phrase that translates to "Thank you for your continued patronage."

spell keepers, an incredible power was administering the very limits of destruction.

"Did that do it?"

Just then, within the diminishing white light, something moved.

"No, it was no use."

Just as Lamington said, the three Vijan-bots had crumbled momentarily, but the unharmed Vijan had gathered immediately, and recreated them just as they had been. What had diminished were only the tens of thousands of small Vijan hovering in the area.

Laharl turned his head and shouted at Genesis. "Oi, keeper!"

"What is it?"

"Do you intend to demand compensation for magic that didn't work at all?"

"I will accept it for precisely as much as I used."

"That's a rip-off! Discount it for as much as it didn't work!!"

"It did not work, but, because magical energy was consumed, it is the same."

Genesis refused to listen and make conversation. "Well then, see you. I will claim my due afterwards."

"Ah, you, don't run!"

Faster than Laharl could stretch out his hand as if to catch him, Genesis vanished as though he had been sucked into an alternate dimension.

Lamington saw this after his keeper's figure had disappeared in the same manner.

The restored Vijan-bots approached with heavy footsteps.

"You lot are all out of tricks now!" Carter's guffaw fell upon them. "Now, Vijan! Overrun Celestia!!"

The small Vijan turned towards the town and began descending. They headed for the areas where there were people first.

Abruptly Flonne raised a scream and flew up. "Ahh, my figures!"

Now that I think about it, she did bring that ridiculously huge suitcase, Laharl recalled.

"Are your figures more important to you than your own house or your family?"

"Well, those are the complete set of the incredibly rare, special edition Defender of Earth Gordon family series, the last of the lot!"

Flonne flew to go pick them up.

"Oi, in that mess!?"

Hurriedly Laharl turned to stop her, but he was obstructed by the Vijan's attacks and could not move.

"Out of the way!"

But, Laharl did not have enough magical power left to attack, only his sword.

He held the Overlord's sword aloft and slashed, but it was repelled entirely.

"Damn it, so if I can't put magic into it, the sword doesn't work."

Growling, he slashed again with all his might.

There was a dry sound, and the blade of the Overlord's sword was nicked.

In the one moment when he faltered, another Vijan thrust in from the side. Taking that one hit to his side, he was sent flying.

Laharl had been sent flying to the ruins of a private home somewhere. It had been caught up in the fighting and had collapsed completely.

"It's no good....."

As he tried to get up, he seemed to be out of energy and pitched forward, falling prostrate.

Just then, a voice came flying from somewhere.
"Hang in there, Laharl-san!"
It was Elle's voice.
"You mustn't abandon hope no matter what the time!"
"Gwah!" Laharl bent backwards as though he had been pierced through the heart.
"Laharl-kun, stand up! The future is waiting for you!" Telle said.
"Ugeh!" Laharl's body bent in two as he cramped up.
"What's happened!?"
"Your wounds are terrible, aren't they?"
"Here, I'll administer my special cure-all of love and courage—"
"You guys, whose side are you on!?"
Having fallen flat on the ground, Laharl jumped up and shouted angrily at Elle and Telle who were leaning over him to see how he was.
"Stringing together nothing but the words I hate!"
But, giving no sign that she cared about his meaning, Elle began to look over Laharl's body.
"Here." Without letting Laharl say yes or no, she began spreading a salve on his body.
"Y-you—"
He could not even muster the energy to protest. But after a little while, strength returned to his body.
"Mm, it's working."
"Yes, it's my special—"
"I've got it, so don't say any more!" Hurriedly he cut off Elle's words. "Now isn't the time to have that kind of conversation!"
Laharl made to hurry for where Flonne was running. From behind him came Telle's voice.
"Laharl-kun, what do you think of our Flonne?"
"W-what is that, at a time like this!?" Laharl asked in reply, flustered.
"I'm asking *because* of the time."
"W-what do you all think?"
"Always—"
"A-always?" Laharl braced himself for the words on Elle's lips. He wondered what he was going to do if they told him to take care of her forever.
"Please get along well with her, okay?" Elle said, smiling sweetly.
"That's it?" Feeling like she was dodging the question, he looked at Elle.
"Yes," came the reply, with a smile that held absolutely no ill-will.
"Leave it to me," he replied after thinking for a moment, and Laharl ran off towards Flonne's house.

Flonne finally arrived at her as-yet-undamaged house, ran into her own room, and rushed to bundle up her large box. She brushed off the dust which had accumulated on top, and checked the box's contents with a glance.

"They're all right, aren't they?"
Appearing relieved, she scooped up the box and returned to the entrance, where already formations of Vijan were closing in from the sky above.

The moment that she tried to run out of the house in a panic, the Vijan noticed Flonne and swiftly bore down on her.

At once she tried to take out her staff and she was careless of her footing. Her foot slipped on the step in the entryway, and she pitched far forward.

The box she was holding left her arms and flew into the air. What was more, the lid on the box was not tightly shut, and the abundant figures inside were thrown out and danced in the air.

"Ahh! My treasure!!" Flonne screamed.

Hordes of Vijan who had noticed her voice changed direction and came for her.

But even so, Flonne held onto the box, and began gathering the scattered figures.

Like a black cloud, the Vijan were before her eyes and nose.

"Flonne!"

Just then, Laharl came running and stood in the way between Flonne and the Vijan.

"Laharl-san....."

"Relax. I won't let these guys lay one finger on you!" he shouted, and levelled his Overlord's sword.

At that moment, the Vijan stopped moving.

"They're overwhelmed by my power, huh." Laharl grinned fearlessly.

"Now's your chance to run," he murmured over his shoulder to Flonne behind him. But, Flonne was rustling around doing something. "What are you doing? Leave those things!"

"They're my precious figures."

One by one Flonne was carefully packing them into the box.

"Hurry up!" Laharl shouted impatiently.

Then, the Vijan in front of him divided, returning to four bodies, and they stepped closer.

"W-what!?"

Ignoring Laharl who stood ready, the Vijan came before Flonne and suddenly threw their bodies to the ground.

"Ahh, the Creator!"

"Eh?"

Holding onto a figure, Flonne's eyes went wide.

The ignored Laharl stood rigid, his sword held aloft.

"It's the Creator."

"Our god."

"She's a goddess."

The noisy whispers of the Vijan spread like undulating waves, and filled the air. All of the Vijan nearby divided and descended, and similarly threw themselves down.

"W-what's going on?" said Flonne.

"Don't ask me." In bewilderment Laharl lowered his sword.

"Hey, hey, why are these guys prostrating themselves?" Etna came up, cautiously avoiding the group of Vijan.

"W-who knows?"

Flonne and Laharl both only tilted their heads.

"They've understood my greatness—"

"That doesn't seem to be it at all."

While their conversation went on, at some point the surrounding battle had calmed and the explosions and sounds of fighting had vanished.

The advance of the Vijan Force had also halted, and Celestia had regained a perfect stillness.

Suddenly the darkness covering Celestia disappeared, and from the heavens a ray of light shown down on Flonne. The umbrella of Vijan covering the sky broke apart, and light came filtering down. In the blink of an eye the darkness vanished, and Celestia returned to the brilliant world it was meant to be.

The Vijan steadily disassembled, and descending to the ground they began prostrating themselves. The ground became utterly buried in Vijan.

"Hey! What are you doing!? Listen to your Creator's orders!!" Carter bellowed from far up in the sky, but they did not stop.

"Um, why is everyone revering me?" Flonne looked around her as though at a loss for the reason.

"Ohhh, the Creator speaks!"

The Vijan raised a cheer.

"Um, are giblets¹⁹ good-tasting?"

"That's not it!"

Etna thrust her open hand at Flonne.

In that moment, the Vijan as one aimed their right arms at Etna. Somehow things like the muzzles of guns appeared.

"W-what!?" Even Etna could not hide her shock at having tens of millions of guns all aimed at her.

"Oi, Flonne," Laharl whispered to Flonne beside him, as if he had thought of something.

"What is it?"

"Say you forgive Etna."

"Eh?"

A light burned in the Vijan's muzzles. They were beam weapons on the verge of firing.

"Say it quickly."

"R-right. Umm, I forgive Etna-san."

The moment she had said it, the Vijan withdrew their arms and returned to their previous positions.

Etna let out a sigh of relief and asked uncomfortably, "Flonne-chan, so you're the queen?"

"But I don't remember that happening....."

Flonne tilted her head slightly, wondering, and the lead Vijan stepped closer and bowed deeply.

"Creator, for a long time we have been searching for you."

"Wait a minute. Wasn't your 'Creator' that guy?" Laharl pointed in Carter's direction.

Carter had been reduced to just his escape pod, and hovered in the air.

"Yes. Certainly we thought so. However, we were mistaken. This person here, she is the true Creator."

"You changed that up awfully easy," Laharl said in a stunned voice.

¹⁹ "Creator" is written 造物主 *zoubutsushu*, and Flonne is mishearing it as 臍物酒 *zoumotsushu*.

"Umm, why am I the Creator?" Flonne still seemed not to understand a thing.

"We have always been searching for the one who produced us. We had this prophecy: 'The Creator made us in their own image. That person, they brought forth small likenesses.'"

"Small likenesses?"

Laharl and Flonne exchanged looks.

"You mean, these?"

Flonne held out the figure of the Defender of Earth Gordon which she held in her hand. That instant, all of the Vijan stirred.

"Ohh, it's just like the prophecy!"

"You really like figures, don't you! I have more of them."

Flonne happily showed them Jennifer and Thursday Mark 3, and Jane. A stirring arose like a rumbling in the ground.

"Ah, but, these are really rare, so I can't give them to you. I'm sorry."

When she said that they were rare,²⁰ Flonne's expression was proud, but the Vijan didn't understand that part.

"Ohh, a word we've never heard before!"

The Vijan fell prostrate all at once.

"Flonne-chan, you've accidentally become an *otaku* goddess." Etna looked at Flonne with sympathetic eyes.

"Eh? I'm telling you, it isn't like that!" Flonne denied forcefully. However, as might be expected for having more than tens of thousands of people worshipping her, it was not at all convincing.

From the sky above the small escape pod came down, the hatch opened, and Carter leaned his body out of it.

"You bastards! Dispose of these guys ahead— what?" Carter bellowed, but then he finally comprehended what the Vijan were worshipping, and he understood his own disadvantage.

"Ngh..... This time I've let you have the cards! But!!" Carter thrust his finger at Laharl. "I haven't lost absolutely!"

"There's no way I'm giving up either, dood!"

Together with Kira he threw down parting threats, and while the Vijan were not attacking, he made to raise the escape pod.

"Wait, Carter!" Laharl shouted and fluttered his scarf, making to fly up.

But then, a low voice was heard from the darkness behind Carter.

"That is as far as you go."

The figure of a tall man stepped from the darkness.

Carter turned around, and his face froze. "Y-you, you're from that time!"

"A hundred years ago, I told you. 'We demons will always be watching you.'²¹"

The man stretched out a hand for Carter's neck.

"S-stop! What are you doing!?"

"I shall have you do public service, just for a little while. A mere 500 years."

"Wait! Stop!!"

The man who had grabbed Carter by the collar also plucked Kira up with his free

²⁰ She uses the word from English, レア *rea*.

²¹ This is precisely the same as Mid-Boss's line in the game, which was simply "We will be watching you" in the English.

hand.

"This prinny I will leave to the Overlord," he said, and turned to Laharl and threw him down.

"Stop, dood!"

As he went spinning, the prinny rolled to Laharl's side. Without a moment's delay, Etna stepped on him.

"I'll think carefully about your punishment later." Etna's grinning expression was one of great anticipation.

"N-no, dood!"

Kira wriggled his arms, but it was futile.

The man who had seized Carter grinned and thrust a finger at Laharl, and then he disappeared into the darkness.

"Prince, Kriche— I mean, Mid-Boss just took the best part.

"That bastard, for a dead guy he keeps butting in!" Laharl said, but somehow his face looked sort of happy.

Then, a voice called to Flonne.

"Sister!"

The one in the green bandana that came running down from the top of the hill was Ozonne.

"Ozonne, are you all right?"

Ozonne came running at Flonne full-speed. "Running away when we still haven't settled this is cowardly. It's time to continue this!"

"It seems like she doesn't remember anything from when she was brainwashed." Etna smiled wryly.

"Laharl is mine!"

"No, he isn't!"

"You're still taking that stance!?"

Laharl grimaced and ran away from the pursuing sisters.

Next Time's Preview²²



²² In the Japanese this is お金の魔術師 *okane no majutsushi*, which sounds quite a bit like 鋼の錬金術師 *hagane no renkinjutsushi* — *Fullmetal Alchemist*.

Epilogue

"Ah, you've failed again."

"We are sorry, Creator."

Flonne made a face that said it couldn't be helped at the Vijan who were bowing their heads in shame.

"If it's something big, then you make it skillfully, but you're absolutely terrible at small things."

"We are sorry, Creator."

"I told you to stop that."

"No, the Creator is the Creator."

Flonne let out a heavy sigh, and looked at the pulverized figures.

In the end the Vijan could not create things the same size as themselves. The life-form which had brought them to life—the Creator had left nothing but his Vijan manufacturing plant and gone on a journey somewhere.

Perhaps he had already perished.

That possibility existed, but Flonne being Flonne, she could not say such a thing.

The Vijan had left on their own journey to search out their Creator, passed several tens of thousands of years, saved Carter by chance, and wound up thinking he was the Creator. After all, he had possessed many machines smaller than the Vijan.

And then, Flonne had had the figures which were not only even smaller, but of the same form as the Creator.

That was what had determined the Creator.

Thanks to that, Celestia's destroyed town was repaired in three days, and Laharl and the others were able to return to the Netherworld only two days later than they had planned.

But, the problem was the Vijan. They had tried to follow Flonne, but there was no way that she could call all of them to the Netherworld.

In the end, just a portion of them separated and changed places for a time. The rest of them were on stand-by out in space. Even so, hundreds of thousands of Vijan had come to the Netherworld.

Well, to say how it all worked out—

A construction rush had begun in town. Development of the demon town which had been barely scraping along now continued without rest. Of course it was because of the Vijan, but there was another reason.

When Laharl went to see the town, the prinnies came bustling up to him.

"We're working hard, too, dood."

"We're almost finished, dood!"

Several prinnies spoke proudly, pointing at some zombie houses in the midst of construction.

"Ohh, well done," Laharl praised them, and the prinnies ran back to the spot.

Wherever he looked, prinnies were working so frantically that it gave him the creeps.

In order to redeem themselves for the sins of their previous lives, prinnies worked to earn money, and once they had saved enough in accordance with their sins, those sins were purified. However, because the Vijan were working for free, they were having their

manual labor taken. The prinnies had no choice but to become frantic.

In a good mood, Laharl's eyes stopped on one prinny in the quarry for the golem's houses.

"Hey, Number 9, you're getting on, huh."

The prinny cutting up stone with a saw answered sullenly, "Yeah, dood."

Around him, Vijan stuck close for surveillance.

"Work hard. Your service period won't be over for a long, long time. After all, you have a hundred thousand years."

Laughing, Laharl went away.

"Someday I'll kill him, dood," he muttered, and he was immediately prodded by a Vijan behind him.

"No unnecessary talking."

"I get it, dood!" Number 9 shouted back, and he continued pulling the saw.

In the Netherworld, peace continued.

Several days later, Laharl was angrily looking over petitions as half-baked and self-centered as always in his room when Etna came up to him.

"Prince, the exchange students from Celestia have arrived."

"Now that you mention it, that was today, wasn't it," Laharl muttered, remembering that he had sent off two people from the Netherworld that morning. He hadn't found any guys from the Netherworld who wanted to go to Celestia, so he had sent out a werecat and pumpkin chosen by random lottery.

Standing in the room, Etna was making a strange expression, and Laharl looked at her suspiciously.

"What's with that face?"

"Well, how should I put it... Well, anyway you'll understand when you see it," Etna said with a subtle, amused expression that spelled trouble.

"What the heck does that mean? Well, fine. Bring them in."

Then, flower petals came fluttering down before Laharl.

"Uhh?"

A gust of wind blew, and the pink flower petals danced in a swirl. What appeared in the center of that was—

"The messenger of love and friendship, the angel of beauty Vyers has arrived!"

The man's suit was smart and stylish, with a single red rose on the breast. On top of that, white wings grew from his back. Reborn in the form of an angel, Mid-Boss himself gave a theatrical bow.

"W-w-w-what the hell, you!?"

On the verge of falling out of his chair, Laharl pointed at Mid-Boss.

"I wonder if you did not hear me? Well, then, once again. I am Celestia's messenger of love and—"

"Enough already!"

"It wasn't 'messenger,' it was 'dead guy.'²³" Etna smiled, making a joke that wasn't a joke.

"And why are you an angel!? What happened to cleansing your sins!?"

"Hmph, what a foolish question. I have already completely proven that I am one

²³ These are homophones in Japanese — 使者 *shisha* and 死者 *shisha*.

who possesses a pure heart which has never harbored either a sin or a wicked thought."

"Ah, now that you mention it....." Etna spoke up.

She remembered that, previously, he had been able to hold calmly to Flonne's pendant, which called down punishment on anyone with a wicked heart who held it.

"Do you understand, mademoiselle? All along, I who so admire beauty had no sins. If I had any, it would be my own beauty."

"I'm getting a headache."

Laharl was honestly holding his head, and from his side a figure came flying.

"Laharl, I'm here!"

"O-Ozone!?"

Completely at a loss for what to do about Ozone embracing him, Laharl looked to Etna for help, but she coldly turned her eyes away.

"The Netherworld seemed like it'd be more comfortable. No one said how long, so I can stay in the Netherworld forever," said Ozone.

Just then Flonne came running in.

"Ozone, get away from Laharl-san!"

"W-why is Flonne here?" Flustered, Laharl tried to get away from Ozone, but with her arms around his neck, he couldn't.

Seeing that, Flonne's tone grew even fiercer. "I came because I had a bad premonition. Get away from him, Ozone!"

"It's fine. And Laharl is free. Or are you trying to say he's yours, Sister?"

"To talk about people like things—!"

"So you aren't? In that case it's fine. Isn't it Laharl?" Flaunting, Ozone snuggled closer to Laharl.

"N-no, Flonne's getting angry," he said.

"But she's not involved."

"Ozone, I'm getting mad."

Ozone laughed abundantly at Flonne, who had taken one step forward. "You mean to use violence on an exchange student? It'll become a big problem."

The fallen angel and the angel glared at each other.

Caught in between the sisters, the Overlord.

There was a tense feeling like fireworks about to burst.

"Even though she should just say it clearly," Etna murmured in amusement, and Mid-Boss snapped his fingers.

"Ohh, that's right. I completely forgot that I was entrusted with a message."

"From who? Lamington?"

If he could escape from this situation, Laharl was willing to rely even on Lamington.

"No, no, it is from the Maman of that mademoiselle." Mid-Boss bowed to Flonne and went on, "'I am entrusting you with our promise,' she said. A promise— Ahh, what a sweet sound it has. For a flower such as yourself, mademoiselle, it is most appropriate."

"Umm, what promise?"

Flonne stared at Laharl with a blank expression.

"N-no, it was, er—"

Flustered, Laharl's gaze searched for a safe place. Flonne seemed not to understand, but Ozone was glaring at him with a severe gaze. Seeking a place to run, he settled on Etna, but she grinned and clapped her hands.

"Don't tell me, you made a decision with her parents about your future?"

"Oi, is that it, Laharl!?" Ozonne pressed him with a strangling force.

"Ggh, you're really strangling..... me—"

And running into the midst of this came Shas.

"Laharl-chan, let's play!"

As soon as she spoke up, Shas took in the scene and looked at Laharl with reproachful eyes. To Shas, Ozonne and Flonne clinging to Laharl's neck could only look like tug-of-war.

"Ah, you're playing with other girls! Even though you promised me!!"

"No, there's no way this is playing....."

"I'm playing, too!" Shas launched herself at Laharl's neck with all her might.

As if to add even more to the confusion, an explosive sound seemed to shake the room.

"We've come to renovate the castle, dood!"

A group of prinny carpenters, apparently competing with the Vijan, came crowding in.

"We'll do this, dood!"

"You will leave it to us," said the Vijan.

The prinnies and the Vijan glared at each other.

Flonne and Ozonne gripped Laharl's neck.

The angel Mid-Boss let out a loud laugh.

"It seems like things are back to normal," Etna laughed in amusement.

"No, they've gotten worse!" Laharl shouted and took in deep, deep breaths.

It seemed that the young Overlord's depression would continue for some time.

Next Time's Preview



Afterward

It wound up coming out again. This is the third volume.

I don't have to say it, but, because this story is continuing, if you do me the favor of reading the volumes *Enter the Mao* and *Revelations* then your understanding will be quicker. Those who have not yet done so, let us run to buy them with great speed. Or rather, please buy them. I ask it of you.

Anyway, this is Kamishiro.

This is the second volume of the original story which follows the novelization of the game, but I thought maybe it would be okay to bring out some characters not in the game—or something like that, and my unease seized me more than I expected with a "ugah," and in a hurry the third volume of the story surfaced.

It's a rushed story, so I continued at a crazy schedule even faster than last time. I am worn out. Laharl's cries are the cries of my heart. I'm serious.

Well then, the last volume was a considerably quiet story, so this time I made it a little showy.

Please look forward to it. (For those reading from the Afterward first.)

How was it? (For those who have finished reading.)

And, each time what I worry about most is next time's preview, but I was thinking maybe it's about time I cut the jokes. Out of the three volumes, I wonder which was the funniest preview? Please share your thoughts with me.

And last but not least, my editors who waited for another story from me, my illustrator Chou Niku-san, and finally everyone at Nippon Ichi Software who OK'd this unexpected project, you have my thanks. Especially Chou Niku-san, who on an even stricter schedule than me even drew my original characters, thank you for your hard work.

And of course, all my readers who hold this in your hands, you have my greatest thanks.

While I'm at it, please try Nippon Ichi Software's new release, *Phantom Brave*. And the soon-to-be-published novelization, too.

January 28, 2004

While listening to the *Timeline* OST...